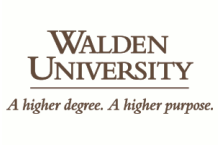

2019

Relational-Cultural Experiences of Burnout by Mothers of Color in Online Counseling Programs

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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by

Juliana J. Forrest-Lytle

MS, Walden University, 2011

BS, University of Central Florida, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education & Supervision

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November 2019

Abstract

Burnout permeates helping professions and is a concern in counselor education and training. The defining characteristics of burnout are depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment. Data on burnout in diverse populations are notably limited. The primary goal of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand the experiences of burnout in mothers of color (MoCs) who were enrolled in or recently (within the last 5 years) graduated from an online Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs accredited clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) program. Another goal of this study was to investigate how MoCs managed burnout. Participants were recruited via the use of social media, a listserv, and a university research participant pool. Purposeful criterion sampling aided in finding participants who self-identified as MoCs and self-reported having experienced burnout within their academic programs. Participants completed demographic surveys to identify diversity within the sample. Interview data were collected via phone. A constant comparative analysis was conducted using a relational cultural theoretical lens. This investigation illuminated (a) self-reported experiences of burnout by MoCs completing master's degrees online in CMHC, (b) how these MoCs reported managing experiences of burnout, (c) the development of a theory using the data obtained from MoCs descriptions of burnout, and (d) information that contributed to the literature exploring burnout in diverse populations. The implications this study may have for social change include the potential to identify areas where multicultural sensitivity is needed in program development and interventions to proactively help combat burnout in student MoCs.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing husband, James Lytle. Without your love and support I would not have been able to make it this far. You are my rock and my calm place, and I am forever grateful that God gave me you. I love you more.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my three awesome kids, Josiah, Isaiah, and Isabella. Thank you for being constant reminders of why I do everything that I do. I appreciate all of your love and hugs throughout this process and your ability to make me smile even when I didn't want to. I am so very proud to be your Mommy. Love you bunches and tons!!!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

I conducted a qualitative GT study to learn the lived experiences of burnout in mothers of color (MoCs) who were currently enrolled in or graduated from online Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) accredited master's in clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) programs within the last 5 years. In this study, I investigated how participants managed burnout with the goal of developing a data-driven theory about the phenomenon of burnout in a diverse student population. In this chapter, I introduce the research topic by providing background information and reviewing current research and knowledge gaps. I also explain the identified research problem, the nature, and purpose of the study, and the potential significance of this research.

Burnout in graduate counseling students is a growing concern among counselor educators, program directors, and other counseling professionals (Bamonti et al., 2014; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Elman & Forrest, 2004; Miller et al., 2011; Munsey, 2006; Savicki & Cooley, 1982; Schwartz-Mette, 2009). Burnout was previously thought to be an issue of concern solely for clinicians (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001); however, Clark, Murdock, and Koetting, (2009) suggested that burnout impacted students, especially second-year and higher-level graduate students due to increased academic demands and a lack of work/life balance. Researchers linked burnout to interpersonal, emotional, behavioral, attitudinal, and physical symptoms (Clark et al., 2009).

Though researchers have not unanimously agreed on a definition of *burnout* (Cieslak, 2016), for this study, I used the following definitions: *negative symptoms* as individual experiences within three specific dimensions: (a) personal accomplishment, (b) depersonalization, and (c) emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001; Wilkerson, 2009). I operationalized *personal accomplishment* as the competence a person feels in their ability to perform academically as well as professionally (Wilkerson, 2009). I then operationalized *depersonalization* as a diminished emotional connection or the lack of empathy an individual feels toward fellow students, instructors, work, and clients (Wilkerson, 2009). Last, I operationally defined *emotional exhaustion* as feeling drained physically and emotionally (Wilkerson, 2009).

Although there has been a notable increase in literature discussing various aspects of burnout and impairment issues among helping professionals and trainees (Aten, Madson, Rice, & Chamberlain, 2008; Bamonti et al., 2014; Barnett & Cooper, 2002; Goncher, Sherman, Barnett, & Haskins, 2013; Miller et al., 2011; Smith & Moss, 2009), Cieslak (2016) bemoaned the lack of recent empirical sources specific to burnout. Burnout is of particular concern because in the notably few current empirical sources on the topic, researchers indicated that there is a consistent presence of burnout in the mental health field (Cieslak, 2016; Craig & Sprang, 2010; El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Smith & Moss, 2009).

El-Ghoroury et al. (2012) asserted that a prominent consequence of burnout is diminished functioning, or impairment. Clinical professionals, as well as counselor educators, have presented evidence to support their assertion that professionals

experiencing burnout have limited ability to adequately deliver professional services (Bamonti et al., 2014; Barnett & Cooper, 2002; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). Counselors experiencing impairment may put already vulnerable clients at greater risk due to their diminished capacity to make ethical decisions that are in the best interest of their clients (Barnett & Cooper, 2002; Killian, 2008). Similarly, impaired counseling students in practicum and internship experiences may put unsuspecting clients at undue risk if they are not aware of their impairment or ways to prevent themselves from becoming impaired (Bamanti et al., 2014; Craig & Sprang, 2010).

Counselor educators and other professional gatekeepers have an ethical imperative to ensure that fledgling counselors entering the profession and beginning to assist clients are not impaired (American Counseling Association, 2014). Researchers reported the prevalence of burnout symptoms with statistics ranging from 5% of a sample of both master's- and doctoral-level helping professionals (psychologists, therapists, social workers) (Craig & Sprang, 2010) to as much as 46% of a sample of practicing clinicians (Mahoney, 1997). Regardless of the exact statistic, burnout was found consistently enough to warrant futher investigation (Craig & Sprang, 2010; Cummings, Massey, & Jones, 2007; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016).

Researchers would be remiss to ignore the potential for impairment in counseling students as a relevant and pressing research topic because individual development of school/life balance as well as practical clinical training experiences are often when students begin developing their self-care habits, or lack the thereof (Bamanti et al., 2014). Gaining an understanding of burnout in counseling students could help to further inform

the understanding of burnout in novice counselors and aid in addressing concerns that arise during the education and training process (Craig & Sprang, 2010; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). However, because depersonalization is specific to interactions between helping professionals and their clients (Clark et al., 2009) and because participants in this study may not yet have had such interactions, I focused specifically on participants' experiences of the personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion dimensions of burnout.

Previously, in graduate training, individual issues of distress or impairment often went unaddressed (Barnett & Cooper, 2002). Instead of continuing in this manner, Barnett and Cooper (2002) recommended that graduate program directors require ongoing educational presentations related to professional burnout and impairment through coursework and regularly scheduled colloquia. Similarly, other authors called for counselor education program developers to inform students about the potential for burnout (Cieslak, 2016; Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel. 2007; Yager & Tovar-Blank, 2007; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). They recommended actively working toward combatting burnout by teaching students self-compassion as well as self-care strategies such as mindfulness and meditation (Cieslak, 2016; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Richards et al., 2010; Shapiro et al., 2007; Yager & Tovar-Blank, 2007; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). The additional emphasis on the individual nature of burnout is part of the challenge and complexity of understanding burnout within the context of a graduate student experience (Cieslak, 2016).

As burnout continues to gain recognition as a concern for graduate student populations (Bamonti et al., 2014; Cieslak, 2016; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016), it is also important to note that there has been a shift in the way a significant portion of students gain access to education. Online education (e-learning) is a contemporary way to earn a degree while maintaining other professional and personal obligations (Bichsel, 2013; Vonderwell, 2003). The number of accredited online counselor education programs continues to grow (CACREP, 2014), mirroring the increased popularity of e-learning in general since its inception in the mid- to late-1990s (Bichsel, 2013). Individuals who cannot or do not attend school in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting for any number of reasons can achieve their educational goals online because of the added flexibility of e-learning (Bichsel, 2013; Kentor, 2015).

Nontraditional students, including those who work fulltime or those who have family obligations, frequently use e-learning as a means of furthering academic pursuits (Bichsel, 2013). Although this is the case, the potential benefits, as well as the potential concerns that may arise within e-learning, cannot go unnoticed. For example, one benefit is that the accessibility of e-learning has been found to encourage students from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to enroll in graduate education programs (Tapanes, Smith, & White, 2009; Venter, 2003). However, the accessibility of e-learning is not without potential drawbacks. Multiple authors found that online learning may leave students feeling isolated or as though they did not have the social support that might have been afforded to them in a brick-and-mortar setting (Ali & Smith, 2015; Phirangee, 2016; Vonderwell, 2003). In addition Ali and Smith (2015) and Venter (2003) noted that if

students were unable to establish relationships with their peers, it was likely that they would experience feelings of loneliness and in some cases would lead to students discontinuing their enrollment.

Problem Statement

Studies documenting the effects of burnout in the counseling profession as well as among master's-level counseling students are plentiful (Bakker et al., 2006; Killian, 2008; Lee et al., 2010; Puig et al., 2012; Skovholt, 2001). Burnout is known to affect graduate students in particular in ways such as mental and physical stress, psychological problems, and career choice disatisfaction (Clark et al., 2009; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016), serving as a deterrent to their ability to complete graduate studies. Multiple authors have cited the need for burnout studies that focus more directly on multicultural and diverse populations (Bray, 2015; Cohen, 2009; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Zeligman et al., 2015) and a search of the literature revealed only one published article in which the researchers specifically addressed burnout in counseling students enrolled in an online learning program (Leykin, Cucciare, & Weingardt, 2011). Through this qualitative study, I examined the descriptions of burnout in a diverse segment of the online counseling graduate student population, MoCs. The findings of this study will help to fill the exisiting gaps in the literature while providing data to counselor educators about ways to better support diverse graduate students throughout their academic programs.

Researchers have conducted studies to explore the prevalence and implications of burnout in professionals (Clark et al., 2009; Cummins et al., 2007; Degun-Mather, 2006; Ducharme et al., 2008; Killian 2008; Lee et al., 2011; Mahoney, 1997; Maslach et al.,

2001; Oser et al., 2013; Pines & Maslach, 1978; Puig et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2010; Savicki & Cooley, 1982; Skovholt, 2012; Smith & Moss, 2009; Wilkerson, 2009) or the need for professionals and trainees to be given tools to combat stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Aten et al., 2008; Bamanti et al., 2014; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Elman & Forrest, 2004; Goncher et al., 2013; Kumari, 2011; Kumary & Baker, Miller et al., 2011; Munsey, 2006; Myers et al., 2012; Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012; Roach & Young, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2007; Schwartz-Mette, 2009). However, these investigators failed to provide an explanation for how diverse students may experience burnout while completing their master's degrees online and how the phenomenon of burnout may contribute to a lack of diversity in practicing professionals. Although an understanding of the experiences of burnout in all student mothers was beyond the scope of this study, I hope that this study will be the beginning of a broader discourse on the needs of women in academia, whether they are mothers of diverse backgrounds or not.

Purpose

My purpose in this study was to understand the lived experiences of burnout within the population of MoCs working toward their master's degrees online in a CACREP-accredited CMHC program. I examined how these mothers managed those experiences of burnout while enrolled in their academic programs. No known research addressed this population of students' experiences of burnout in this setting. To address this gap in the literature, I used a qualitative, GT research design.

Through the investigation, I illuminated (a) the self-reported descriptions of burnout experiences by MoCs who recently (within the last 5 years) completed or were

currently completing CACREP-accredited master's degrees in CMHC, (b) how these MoCs reported managing those experiences of burnout, (c) the development of a theory about how MoCs managed burnout, (d) information to contribute to the literature exploring burnout with diverse populations, and (e) information to inform and aid program administrators and developers in proactively combating burnout and reducing attrition in online graduate counseling students who are MoCs.

I recruited participants by posting my research invitation via social media posts on Facebook, emails disseminated using the COUNSGRADs listserv, and on Walden University's research participant pool website. I applied purposeful criterion sampling to find participants who self-identified as women of color, were mothers, and self-reported having experienced burnout within their program of study. Participants who met criteria and who elected to participate completed a brief demographic survey to identify cultures and diversity within the sample. I conducted all participant interviews via phone. Throughout the data collection and interview process, I engaged in constant comparative analysis of the data while using a relational cultural theoretical (RCT) lens.

The data that I gathered comprised the foundation of an emergent theory about the experiences of burnout by a diverse cultural group of students. I used the research findings to suggest ways to help inform program development and the profession at large about the needs of diverse mothers who are also online graduate CMHC students, enrolled in CACREP accredited programs. Such data may also support the advancement of theories of diversity and the retention of diverse female students within CACREP accredited counseling programs thereby, decreasing attrition and potentially increasing

the overall diversity of practicing counselors who are qualified and available to provide mental health counseling services.

I chose to address this gap because an additional understanding of students' experiences of burnout will help the developers of counselor education programs take steps toward proactive prevention (Bamonti et al., 2014; Cieslak, 2016; Elman & Forrest, 2004). In addition, I sought to use the development of a data-driven theory to address the ethical imperative calling for the diversification of counseling research (American Counseling Association, 2014; Galotti, 2004). Through the findings of this study, I hoped to provide professionals in the field of counselor education with an understanding of how graduate counseling student mothers from diverse backgrounds describe their experiences of burnout. This data may assist developers of academic programs in establishing proactive measures (Bamonti et al., 2014) to support the unique needs of this population and hopefully increase retention and graduation rates for MoCs in e-learning programs (Zeligman et al., 2015).

Significance

Because of the existing gaps in the professional knowledge base about burnout, counselor educators may be unable to meet the needs of graduate students who are MoCs and experiencing burnout while enrolled in master's level CACREP-accredited online CMHC programs. Through this inquiry, I sought to fill gaps in the existing research via a qualitative study that documented the actual experiences of MoCs who were managing (or recently managed) burnout during their online academic programs. These gaps were concerning because women currently make up a large percentage of practicing counselors

(ACA, 2013; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017) and enrollment in online counselor education programs continues to grow (Bichsel, 2013). However, based on university demographic data, women of color are not represented in the counseling profession at levels consistent with program enrollment (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Walden University, 2015). Investigating the experiences of burnout in this population may help inform preventive interventions and increase program retention, specifically, for MoCs. In addition, the insights obtained may help to inform future development of multicultural theories and competencies, as well as supporting academic program development. Last, the findings of this study added to and diversified the existing literature on burnout.

The completed research may also be useful in ascertaining whether existing research findings apply to a more diverse population than was initially proposed. Galotti (2004) criticized the previously common practice of treating various models, theories, and data as universal. Women of color are inherently different because their experiences are affected, at a minimum by the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2000; Saulnier, 2013). As such, existing theories may not apply to their experiences. One cannot assume the available research findings on burnout will apply to individuals who differ from the dominant culture and primarily homogenous studies of other cultural groups (Saulnier, 2013).

The idea of a one-size-fits-all approach to research continues to be challenged by investigators who even after completing their inquiries petition for further research diversification (Du, Zhou, Xu, & Lei, 2016). Previous investigators of burnout identified the need for additional research to focus directly on the phenomenon in multicultural and

diverse populations (Bray, 2015; Cohen, 2009; Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015). For this study, I allowed a theory to emerge from the analysis of the data gathered from MoCs in online CACREP-accredited CMHC programs. The research I conducted began to fill the void in the literature on burnout in diverse populations, possibly making connections between what is already known and what remains unknown.

Background

Burnout is a prevailing topic in counselor education and training (Roach & Young, 2007; Skovholt, 2001; Yager & Tovar-Blank, 2007). In exisiting literature, authors focused on burnout as experienced by practitioners, but not how the phenomenon of burnout might be experienced by graduate counseling students (Aten et al., 2008; Bakker et al., 2006; Barnett & Cooper, 2009; Goncher et al., 2013; Killian, 2008; Lee et al., 2010; Puig et al., 2012; Skovholt, 2001; Smith & Moss, 2009). A comprehensive search of the professional literature published within the last 5 years revealed less than ten peer-reviewed articles reporting results from studies examining burnout with counseling students.

In recent studies, authors indicated that in general, online learning might leave some students feeling isolated or unsupported (Phirangee, 2016; Vonderwell, 2003). Phirangee (2016) sought to gain a better understanding of the negative feelings students' experienced by conducting an interview study of online student learners. The author specified that students whose cultural experiences differed from the majority group did not feel welcome to share their experiences (Phirangee, 2016). The author went on to

assert that participants' feelings of alienation, isolation, and disconnection were the main factors that attributed to attrition in their online learning (Phirangee, 2016). Although online learning does not inherently promote isolation, some students reported struggling to feel connected to both their professors and peers (Venter, 2003). The online learners who experienced a lack of connection may also have exhibited differences in culture which in turn might have impacted the perceptions these students had of their learning experiences and the challenges they faced while seeking higher education (Venter, 2003).

Though online learners often benefit from the inclusion of discussion boards, chat rooms, and other means of direct interaction between instructors and peers (Venter, 2003), even with these options, students reported feelings of isolation during their online education experiences (Vonderwell, 2003). The demographics of these students may be a question for some. Some looked like me. Some did not look like me. Some worked, and some stayed at home. All were online learners and had set goals that depended on being able to complete education online.

Counseling students are meant to receive training and be equipped with tools to identify symptoms and address burnout (Shapiro et al., 2007). The ACA code of ethics (2014) and the 2016 CACREP standards (2016) stated that burnout and impairment are important topics of ongoing counselor education and professional awareness efforts. However, the actual number of online counseling students who experienced burnout remains unknown. The way these students manage their experiences of burnout to continue toward their academic goals is also unclear. Through this study, I sought to uncover answers to this question from within the population of MoCs.

Although burnout and isolation were factors that could affect all counseling students, I sought information specific to MoCs who were enrolled in or graduated from online CACREP accredited master's counseling programs within the last 5 years. There was an apparent disconnect between the number of women of color who enrolled in graduate counseling programs and the number of women of color who ultimately entered the profession. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics 2017 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, women made up approximately 72% of counseling professionals. Of these women, only 30% identified as women of color (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2017). These demographics differed startlingly from counseling program enrollment figures. In 2015, Walden University, a large online university with a well-known CACREP-accredited online clinical mental health counseling program, reported nearly 77% of enrolled graduate students were women and almost half of those identified as nonwhite.

Further demographic information from Walden University (2015) indicated that 48.7% of students were between the ages of 24 and 39 years. Students in this age range were significant because the Central Intelligence Agency (2013) reported that the median age for first births in women in the United States is 25.6 years. Therefore, it was highly likely that with females making up 77% of the student body, a substantial number of Walden University students were mothers (Walden University, 2015). If Walden University's demographics were indicative of a national trend in online education, approximately half of all women enrolled in graduate education were women of color

(African-American; Hispanic/Latino; Asian/Pacific Islander; and American Indian/Alaskan Native) and a sizable percentage of those women were mothers.

The available data on burnout in graduate students with diverse cultural backgrounds was decidedly limited (Lee et al., 2010). As noted, previous researchers focused primarily on burnout in professional counselors, and only one article specifically addressed burnout in counselor trainees in an online program (Lee et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Leykin et al., 2011). Multiple authors urged future researchers to explore burnout in different student and practitioner populations and cultures citing the potential to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence burnout in diverse populations (Clark et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2011). These authors suggest using the the research findings to proactively prevent issues that stem from burnout and impairment during counselor education and training by making concerted efforts within education programs (Clark et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2011).

Zeligman et al. (2015) affirmed that women of color have "different journeys and experiences in higher education" (p. 66). The authors emphasized the need for research on the experiences of women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The authors called for such specific focus in part due to the underrepresentation of these groups in academia as well as the numerous factors these women consider before deciding to pursue higher education (Zeligman et al., 2015). These factors included financial ability/obligations, support, benefits, childbearing, and mentorship (Zeligman et al., 2015). The authors noted the factors above were most frequently deliberated by female

potential graduate students, whereas a much smaller number of male students took such factors into account when deciding to pursue higher education (Zeligman et al., 2015).

Women were specifically more likely to take family and other obligations into consideration when setting personal, educational goals (Lynch, 2008); however, their male counterparts rarely did the same (Zeligman et al., 2015). For example, on deciding to pursue higher education, single women of childbearing age often considered the potential needs of children that were not yet in existence (Holm, Prosek, & Weisberger, 2015; Lynch, 2008). This consideration often led these women to feel as though they had to put off having children to pursue academic goals or as though they had to choose between being "good moms" or "good students" (Lynch, 2008). Though this was not the case across the board, it lent support to the idea that mothers in education already had more concerns to address than their non-mom and male counterparts.

The financial considerations most students, especially women of color made when thinking about enrolling in higher education included a cost-benefit analysis looking specifically at the amount of money and time obtaining a degree would take in comparison with the earning potential having the degree would ultimately provide (Schultheiss, 2009; Zeligman et al., 2015). In addition, women considered whether and when they intended to start a family, how pursuing a graduate degree could throw them off schedule, and once they had a family, the resulting childcare expenses (Schultheiss, 2009; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). Childbearing was another area where women of color felt especially torn (Zeligman et al., 2015).

Mentorship was another deciding factor in some cases. Miller and Stone (2011) cited faculty support and mentorship as primary factors in promoting self-confidence for women of color in graduate school. Women of color were limited in opportunities for mentoring relationsips due to severe underrepresentation in academia (Grant & Simmons, 2008). Although it is not necessary for mentors to have similar ethnic backgrounds as their mentees, it can be hard for students of color when there is not even the possibility of having a mentor with which to connect on this level (Zeligman et al., 2015). A lack of mentorship can affect an individual's potential for burnout by preventing the student from having regular contact with a more senior, skilled professional who may glean potential burnout during its onset.

The decision-making process for women of color was different because the decision was based on perceived difficulties (Zeligman et al.,2015). These difficulties included intergrating into a graduate program, the lack of other minorities in the field, and whether or not the women of color wanted to embark on the challenge of carving a path on a road that had yet to be travelled by someone like them (Zeligman et al., 2015). When these women were also mothers, they most often made additional familial, cultural, and personal considerations despite not yet having a foundation of research to which they could fully relate (Bray, 2015).

The definition of burnout I ascribed to throughout the study was the negative symptoms individuals experience within three dimensions: (a) personal accomplishment, (b) depersonalization, and (c) emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001; Wilkerson, 2009). For the completed research, the definition of personal accomplishment was the

competence a person felt in her ability to perform academically as well as professionally (Wilkerson, 2009). Depersonalization was a diminished emotional connection or lack of empathy the individual felt toward fellow students, instructors, work, and clients (Wilkerson, 2009). Wilkerson (2009) described emotional exhaustion as feeling drained physically and emotionally (Wilkerson, 2009). Wright and Cropanzano (1998) asserted that individuals affected by emotional exhaustion described feeling "overextended" and often did not feel capable of sufficiently handling the depletion of physical and emotional energy.

No known literature existed in which researchers addressed the qualitative experiences or management of burnout in student mothers. Ideally, through this study, I have illuminated how MoCs navigated and responded to burnout during their online graduate studies. These findings could help form the basis of a theoretical understanding to assist educators and administrators in developing proactive programming. This programming could potentially support the academic success of a diverse segment of the student population, ultimately contributing to a more diverse population of professionals working in the field. These findings can also be used to help address concerns about impairment in this population as well as furthering the discussion program developers and policy makers have about meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and who operate within multiple roles.

Framework

I viewed the data from this study through the theoretical lens of RCT. Relational cultural theorists posited that people grow through relationships throughout their lives

and that their cultures affect those relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Duffey and Somody (2011) noted that the principles of RCT suggest people need connection. It remains possible that women of color who were mothers in online learning environments lack social support and connectivity that students who interact with peers face to face may have. RCT theorists focused on interconnectedness and collectivism as well as the socio-cultural aspects that inform an individual's day-to-day life (Frey, 2013). The various cultures that participants in this study identify with may have further impacted their growth and abilities to negotiate their experiences of burnout. Using an RCT framework, I facilitated an analysis of the data that included how relationships and culture seemed to inform the experiences of burnout participants' described.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were the following:

1. How do women of color who are mothers completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in a CACREP-accredited online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?
2. How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online CACREP-accredited learning environment?

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative using GT methodology. I selected this design because it allowed me to establish a theory to explain the management of burnout in women of color who are mothers working toward their master's in MHC online. Lent

and Schwartz (2012) asserted that no single theory accounts for all iterations of burnout because there are numerous ways people experience and manage burnout, and it is a common problem. For example, one person experiencing burnout might feel high levels of anxiety and report physical strain/tension in their neck and back (Ducharme et al., 2008), whereas another person experiencing burnout may report frequent headaches and feelings of depression (Craig & Sprang, 2010), whereas another person experiencing burnout lacks the aforementioned physical symptoms but feels tired all the time and is exceedingly stressed thinking about all of the tasks they need to get done and ultimately is unable to do anything because of feeling overwhelmed (El Ghoroury et al., 2012). Each of these iterations of burnout could be potentially debilitating and is no less concerning than the others.

Consider further that the preceding descriptions do not supply information about the individuals experiencing burnout aside from their symptoms, one could be a Caucasian man supporting his wife and children, one might be a single mother who immigrated from Mexico, and yet another might be an African American transsexual woman working and living in an environment that is not open to her being who she is. Researchers recognized significant associations of burnout with individual factors such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (Lent and Swartz, 2012; Viehl et al., 2017). Leone et al. (2011) found that culture, specifically, is an important issue in burnout because it gives meaning to the individual's symptoms as well as the diagnosis. Collins (2000) and Saulnier (2013) posited that developers of mainstream theories did not consider women of color. Further, Saulnier (2013) decried the previous discounting of the viewpoints of

women of color in academic theorizing. There is abundant quantitative data on burnout; however, there are little qualitative data and no specific data on the population of women of color who are mothers earning master's degrees in an online CACREP-accredited CMHC program.

I presented data from which a theory considering women of color was drawn. RCT was the lens through which I viewed the data, and this theory served as the philosophical foundation for understanding themes and patterns that emerged throughout the study. I used GT as the method of analysis to examine emergent themes and patterns in the data that contributed to the development of a theory as lauded by Corbin and Strauss (2008).

To advertise the study and recruit potential participants, I disseminated an online recruitment flyer via Walden University's Research Participant Pool, the COUNSGRAD Listserv, and personal and counseling Facebook groups and pages to which I was a member. The recruitment flyer included a brief explanation of the intended research, participant qualifications, and a link to the informed consent and demographic survey. Participants self-identified using inclusionary criteria presented in the study invitation. Respondents who opted to participate in the study clicked on the electronic hyperlink embedded in the recruitment flyer to provide an electronic signature on the informed consent, followed by a brief demographic survey. At the end of the survey, respondents had the option of selecting a pseudonym to be used throughout all communications and provided their preferred method of contact to schedule an interview at their convenience. I used the demographic survey to obtain a detailed picture of the diversity within the

entire sample such as age, enrollment status, and identified ethnicities. I used the demographic data to identify additional factors within the participant pool that might relate to the management of burnout by the target population.

At no time did I require or coerce participants into engaging in the research or interview process. I informed participants that they were free to discontinue participation at any time and for any reason. I further informed participants about the logistics of the interviews upon scheduling. I anticipated initial interviews would last between 60 and 90 minutes. However, the interviews actually lasted between 35 and 75 minutes in length. I expected follow-up interviews to explore emerging categories and theoretical notions to vary and to continue until no new data was forthcoming. I discussed follow-up interviews at the end of the initial interviews. I reached out to participants via their identified preferred method of contact to go over transcripts and to present a follow-up question that emerged from the data. Half of the respondents chose not to engage in a follow-up interview. Those participants who did choose to respond opted to answer the follow-up interview question via email or text.

Questions during the interviews included:

- Talk about your experiences as both a graduate student and a mother.
- Talk about how your ethnicity impacts your experiences as a graduate student.
- Tell me about a time when you felt defeated. What did you do to get yourself back on track?

- Who, if anyone, do you reach out to when you feel overwhelmed? What about this person makes you reach out to him/her?
- How do you make time to do things you enjoy?
- When you make time for yourself, what do you do?
- What are some of the challenges you have with your online learning process?
- What are some changes you wish were incorporated into online learning to make the process better for you?

I transcribed and analyzed the interviews in an ongoing process which led to the discovery of emergent themes and patterns within the experiences shared by participants (Bakker et al., 2006; Elman & Forrest, 2004). Identifying themes and patterns in the data informed the development of an emergent theory specific to this population (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Data from this study might help program evaluators and developers craft programs that incorporate training and knowledge about burnout in student populations, shifting from a potentially reactive response to student burnout to using a preventative stance on addressing burnout in counselor education (Bamonti et al., 2014).

Types and Sources of Information or Data

1. Initial interviews with master's-level Clinical Mental Health Counseling students who identify as women of color, are mothers and have experienced burnout within the current school year.
2. Follow-up interviews with participants.
3. Researcher notes taken during interviews.

4. Detailed demographic survey data from participants.
5. A Researcher's journal reflecting on the overall process as well as the data collected.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

I made a few assumptions throughout this research. First, I assumed that participants could articulate their experiences of burnout accurately and would do so honestly. I also assumed that participants chose to complete their education online to add some level of flexibility or convenience to their lives that would otherwise be missing. Last, I assumed participants would want to share their experiences to help build a research base that reflects their segment of the population of online CMHC students.

As with all research, there were limits to the study. These limitations included the number of women of color who are mothers in online CACREP-accredited CMHC master's programs. In addition participants needed to be able to relay information successfully and had to have access to and know how to use cellular phone and computer technology.

A notable limitation of this research was the fact that the data I collected only represented the experiences of the graduate students who received an invitation to participate and choose to accept. The routes for the dissemination of invitations included Walden University's Research Participant Pool, ACA's COUNSGRADS Listserv, and social media posts via Facebook. Data from this research may not represent the experiences of students in non-CACREP-accredited programs, other graduate counseling programs, or the experiences of students in traditional universities. Qualitative research

findings are inherently subjective, which means the data most often will not generalize outside of the population at the center of the study (Creswell, 2013). Factors such as time constraints, researcher bias, and telephone/internet access also limited this study.

The delimitations of this study included the use of operational definitions for who is considered a woman of color and burnout, the use of a basic interview protocol, and the decision to forgo attempting to use visual technology. In addition the fact that the population only came from students in CACREP-accredited CMHC master's programs also acted as a limitation to the study. The final limitation of the study was the exclusion of experiences from students in traditional brick and mortar MHC programs.

Summary and Transition

My purpose in this investigation was to understand the experiences of burnout by MoCs in CACREP-accredited online CMHC master's programs as well as to understand how participants managed symptoms of burnout. I selected a GT methodology because it was inductive and allowed the primary focus to be on generating an explanation of the experiences of burnout by the participants (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). I gathered qualitative data from the use of a demographic survey and participant interviews. I used a qualitative, GT design to organize and analyze the data. My foundation for understanding the data was grounded in RCT. I used an RCT lens for this study because RCT is based on the idea that relationships and connectivity foster growth (Comstock et al., 2008; Duffey & Somody, 2011). I used the analyzed data to develop an emergent theory based on examining how MoCs described their experiences of and managed burnout. Through an understanding of the topic, I aimed to help educate

program developers about the needs specific to this population which in turn might help lessen attrition.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss literature relevant to the topics of burnout, online education, and RCT. In addition, I will present information about MoCs in higher education. In Chapter 3, I will present the research methodology, including detailed information on the steps I will follow to complete the qualitative inquiry and develop an emergent theory. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the proposed study. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will summarize and conclude the study with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Burnout in CMHC students continues to be a growing concern for counseling professionals (Bamonti et al., 2014). At the same time, there is little known about the experience of burnout in online counseling students. In addition to inherent academic performance requirements, stressors, such as the lack of support and the need for time management skills (Vonderwell, 2003), may be experienced by CMHC students who are MoCs utilizing an online learning environment. These stressors may further contribute to student experiences of burnout. Numerous authors have affirmed the need for insight into the diverse groups that make up the population of CMHC students as well as what they experience as they progress through their professional training (Lee et al., 2010; Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). Although MoCs are a specific subset of this population, their experiences of burnout may provide insight that can be beneficial to counseling program development and student retention efforts.

In this chapter, I will present a review of the literature pertinent to the current study. After a brief overview of the search strategy, I will present relevant literature on the theory behind this study: RCT. I will then provide literature on burnout, the growing popularity and use of online education, and the increase in the number of mothers seeking higher education. I will then elaborate on how all of these factors tie into this study. I will conclude the chapter with a summary and transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

The review of literature involved conducting various searches using the Walden University Library EBSCOhost electronic research database. The databases that I used included Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, ERIC, Expanded Academic ASAP, and ProQuest Central. The search terms that I used in each database included *burnout, counselor/counseling education, online learning, online education, master's student mothers, online master's education, diverse student mothers, student mothers, graduate student mothers, graduate student mothers of color, counselor trainees, mental health counselor programs, work-life balance, GT,* and *relational cultural theory.*

Iterative Search Process

During the search process, I used various combinations of the preceding terms to procure articles for germane scholarship from individual databases. For example, I combined the terms *graduate, student,* and *mothers* in Academic Search Complete with search parameters limiting articles to peer-reviewed journals and publication dates within the last 10 years. Similarly, I used the terms *graduate, student,* and *burnout* in SocINDEX and PsycINFO. In addition, I completed searches using the terms *student, mothers,* and *online.* I also limited these searches within the last 10 years and from peer-reviewed journals. Finally, I completed a search of recent dissertations using the terms *student, mothers,* and *burnout.*

Literature in which authors focused primarily on mothers in online learning environments was notably scant. As such, I broadened my searches to include research

completed in other professions and educational concentrations such as business, social work, and nursing. The findings of studies in these other fields provided a foundation for my research.

Relational Cultural Theory

I used RCT as my primary philosophical lens while analyzing the compiled data. Baker Miller is credited with developing RCT by reframing "the psychology of women" as one emphasizing relationships (Jordan, 2008; Lenz, 2014). However, as RCT has continued to develop, theorists assert that RCT is designed to aid the movement transitioning our culture from separatism to connectivity (Jordan, 2008). According to this theory, human interaction (and the lack thereof) plays an integral role in an individual's sense of accomplishment and success (Jordan, 2008). These human interactions or exchanges can and do alter a person and their perception of an experience by way of relational outcomes (Lenz, 2014).

According to Lenz (2014), people desire relationships. For individuals to consider their relationships meaningful, however, empathy, an understanding of one another, and mutuality, sharing between individuals in a relationship, must exist (Lenz, 2014). The idea that culture and community play a part in the perceived meaningfulness of a relationship illuminates the necessity of truly understanding these connections.

Consider a new mother that is trying to cope with postpartum depression (PPD). According to O'Hara and McCabe (2013), between 10% and 20% of new mothers in the United States experience PPD. PPD is associated with maternal impairment, feelings of guilt, as well as personal and social stigma (O'Hara & McCabe, 2013; Scharp & Thomas,

2017). In some ways, society has defined *motherhood* as a subculture in which only certain women feel worthy and a part. These women meet the ideal for intensive mothering and therefore are "good mothers" (Schultheiss, 2009). Contrarily, for a new mother struggling with PPD, feeling like a "bad mother" comes with social stigma and feelings of shame and inadequacy (Scharp & Thomas, 2017). Not meeting the societal ideal of a "good mother" may leave the new mom feeling as though she is not a member of the culture of motherhood. Scharp and Thomas (2017) described the act of mothering as a connection between mothers and children. This "interconnectedness" or the lack thereof can influence how these moms navigate their PPD as well as other day-to-day challenges (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Scharp & Thomas, 2017).

In the case of the postpartum mother, it is difficult to navigate the contradictory experiences of maternal impairment and attempting to meet the societal standard of "good mothering" (Scharp & Thomas, 2017). In either case, she will view and judge herself according to her perception of the relationship she has with her child and the importance she has assigned to that interaction (Holm et al., 2015). The level of import she assigns is often influenced by societal expectations and norms (Scharp & Thomas, 2017).

Culture, from this lens, is not limited to the dominant culture surrounding an individual, but also includes the smaller, subcultures to which the individual belongs (Cohen, 2009). Cultures impact the information, education, and practices to which people living within them are exposed (Cohen, 2009). Snibbe and Markus (2005) found that individuals living within the culture of lower socioeconomic status often have less

education and are more likely to adapt to their surroundings than their higher socioeconomic counterparts. Although this may not always be the case, people within the culture of lower socioeconomic status are limited in ways that others outside of that culture are not (Cohen, 2009; Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

Cultures can differ from one another psychologically (Cohen, 2009). For example, the value individuals place on an object or custom comes directly from the culture in which they live (Cohen, 2009). Practicing certain rituals or wearing specific attire does not necessarily mean a person is more devout or invested in their religious experience than their counterpart who does not partake in the same ways.

Relational cultural theorists posited that people grow through relationships throughout their lives and that their cultures impact those relationships at length (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Duffey and Somody (2011) noted that the principles of RCT further suggest people need connection. When human connections are effective personal and relational growth occurs (Jordan, 2008). Contrarily, when these interactions are ineffectual, they lead to disconnectedness (Comstock et al., 2008; Trepal, Boie, & Kress, 2012).

RCT identifies five factors, or "good things" (Jordan, 2008; Lenz, 2016) that contribute to relational growth. These five good things are clarity, worth, creativity, zest, and a desire for more connection between parties in the relationship. Trepal, Boie, and Kress (2012) referred to Miller (1986) stating that effective interactions "are characterized by mutual growth and contribute to 'the five good things' where each person (a) feels a greater sense of 'zest' (vitality, energy), (b) feels more able to act and

does act, (c) has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s), (d) feels a greater sense of worth, and (e) feels more connected to other persons and exhibits a greater motivation to connect with others" (p. 348). It is possible that diverse mothers in online learning environments lack the social support and connectivity to feel these "good things," whereas students who can interact with their professors and peers face to face may have an easier time establishing the connections necessary for growth.

Focusing on interconnectedness and collectivism as well as the socio-cultural aspects that inform an individual's day to day life may further illuminate areas where MoCs struggle or thrive (Frey, 2013). Brewer and Chen (2007) operationalized collectivism as a myriad of cultural ways of connecting and relating to others. From an RCT standpoint, this definition of collectivism speaks to the interactions that will potentially foster or hinder growth (Trepal et al., 2012). The various cultures that participants in this study identified with may also impact their growth and abilities to negotiate their individual experiences of burnout. Using an RCT framework helped to facilitate an analysis of the data that included how relationships and culture informed participants' experiences.

Theorists developed RCT as a means of explaining the psychology behind women's experiences because it was not represented in traditional theories at the time (Jordan 2008). RCT's roots were feminist in nature and were intended to help give voice to the marginalized voices of women (Jordan, 2017). However, although well-intentioned, RCT still originated from a place that was not particularly inclusive (Jordan, 2017). The initial viewpoint was only indicative of the experiences of White women but

has since been expanded to include the experiences of women of color, women of differing sexual orientation, and even marginalized men (Jordan, 2017). RCT is about all people needing to connect with others in order to empower and incite action.(Jordan, 2017) The use of RCT was congruent with this research effort as the data obtained from this study focused on the experiences of burnout in women of color who were also mothers seeking higher education online.

If all people grow through connection, isolation and disconnection can stunt or disrupt potential growth (Jordan, 2008). Jordan (2008) further acknowledged chronic disconnection as a primary source of suffering for most individuals. When people do not feel connected, they do not have meaningful engagement (Lenz, 2014). This lack of meaning in relational interactions can lead to stagnation and can ultimately cause individuals to withdraw from relational interactions (Lenz, 2014). Ali and Smith (2015) and Venter (2003) suggested students in e-learning environments may, at times, feel disconnected and that their experiences of isolation often vary based on culture. There was a distinct possibility that experiences of burnout described by participants in this study would include feelings of "disconnectedness" to some extent which may have been exacerbated by their membership in e-learning as a culture.

Burnout

Burnout is a topic that is becoming more and more well known today. This mainstreaming of knowledge is evident in the growing number of magazine articles and blog posts, helping laymen assess and address burnout in their lives (Gerry, 2013). Burnout in mainstream media is also evidenced by the existence of not so far off the mark

definitions of burnout accessible on popular culture websites such as Forbes Magazine's website, forbes.com (Gerry, 2013) and urbandictionary.com. Although these mainstream resources do not uphold scholarly tradition to the letter, there is something to be said for the sheer number of people who have ready access to information about burnout.

Trippany, White-Kress, and Wilcoxon (2004) described burnout as a general feeling of being overwhelmed, while James and Gilliland (2013) described it as an "internal psychological experience" (p.613) which involves feelings, attitudes, and expectations. For the proposed research, I used Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter's (2001) definition of burnout. They defined burnout as the negative symptoms individuals experience within three dimensions: a) personal accomplishment, b) depersonalization, and c) emotional exhaustion. I operationalized burnout for this inquiry by focusing on personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion as the indicators of burnout most likely experienced by graduate students (Clark et al., 2009). I excluded depersonalization based on the assumption that not all participants would be interacting with clients at the time of the research.

Burnout, in general, is pervasive throughout all areas of specialization within the counseling profession (Lee et al., 2010; Oser, Biebel, Pullen & Harp, 2013).Wardle and Mayorga (2016) emphasized the idea that everyone in the counseling profession, no matter the specialization or student status, is vulnerable to burnout. Lee et al. (2010) found burnout present in participants who self-identified as specializing in areas such as school counseling, family counseling, mental health counseling, and rehabilitation counseling. Oser et al. (2013) investigated burnout in substance abuse counselors in both

urban and rural areas. This pervasiveness also appears to include graduate counseling students and counselor trainees (Cieslak, 2016; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016).

Burnout is a central topic due in part to its pervasiveness as well as the concern it presents for helping professionals and clientele alike (Bamanti et al., 2014). When clinicians experience burnout, their mental and emotional well-being, as well as their clients, are often jeopardized (Lee et al., 2010). Helping professionals experience burnout most frequently due to the emotions that client-caregiver relationships engender (Goncher et al., 2013). The most notable of these emotions include apathy and discouragement (Puig et al., 2012). This is concerning because empathy is a cornerstone of the therapeutic alliance (Cieslak, 2016).

Burnout remains a germane topic within the counseling profession due in part to the increase in emergency situations and tragedies experienced today (Craig & Sprang, 2010). As long as clients have trauma, clinicians will be at risk for burnout and vicarious trauma (Degun- Mather, 2006). Craig and Sprang (2010) noted indirect exposure to traumatic experiences could increase the likelihood of burnout and compassion fatigue in clinicians. Compassion fatigue describes the changes clinicians experience in the areas of behavior, cognition, and emotion due to exposure to client trauma (Craig & Sprang, 2010).

Counselors and other mental health professionals are also being sought out in growing numbers (Aten et al., 2008). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Outlook Handbook 2016-2017 edition, this is primarily because more insurance policies cover mental health counseling services. Although this growth benefits

the counseling profession, it makes burnout and impairment all the more salient as topics of discussion (Broome et al., 2009). An increase in the demand for clinical services means practicing counselors may have larger caseloads. Impairment becomes a concern when clinicians are overwhelmed, which can happen when caseloads are too full (Butler et al., 2019).

Research on burnout in counseling students and trainees is not nearly as prevalent as research in other helping professions despite author attestations that counseling students may be "especially vulnerable (Clark et al., 2009 p. 581)." Research on student populations is more plentiful in areas such as school counseling and counseling psychology (Clark et al., 2009; El Ghoroury et al., 2012; Goncher et al., 2013). However, recent studies have attempted to begin filling this gap (Cieslak, 2016; Clark et al., 2009; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016).

Wardle and Mayorga (2016) conducted a study to determine the presence of burnout indicators in master's-level counseling students. The investigators found that 85% of respondents in their study of graduate counseling students had some degree of indication that their levels of burnout were something to pay attention to or that the respondents were blatantly burned out (Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). The authors affirmed the potential for burnout in student counselors and attested "students need to be aware of signs and symptoms and be taught the importance of addressing their own mental health needs, well-being, and self-care (Wardle & Mayorga, 2016 p.13)."

Graduate student MoCs can have any number of stressors that can contribute to their experiences of burnout. Factors that can lead to burnout include feeling

overwhelmed, being over-extended, and not asking for help when necessary (Craig & Sprang, 2010; El Ghoroury et al., 2012; Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Leone et al., 2011). El Ghoroury et al. (2012) investigated further finding graduate psychology students frequently cited stressors that included finances, anxiety, as well as academic responsibilities. Although external factors often play a large part in burnout, Lent and Schwartz also considered internal and personality factors that were predictors of burnout such as neuroticism and agreeableness.

Personality factors can be particularly concerning for women of color as some of these factors are inextricably tied to culturally prescribed expectations (Collins, 2000; Saulnier, 2013). For example, many individuals raised in the African American community have been taught that asking for help is a sign of weakness (Collins, 2000). This cultural belief could potentially cause an even larger internal struggle in an African-American counseling student who is feeling overwhelmed and has been taught by her educational program that the way to deal with feeling overwhelmed is to ask for help. How, then, does this student deal with this issue? Who does this student turn to for support? Unfortunately, research on burnout specific to race has been inconsistent and inconclusive at best (Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Salyers & Bond, 2001). What has become exceedingly clear, however, is the need for more and in-depth qualitative research into burnout in both student and diverse populations (Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Salyers & Bond, 2001; Viehl et al., 2017; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016).

Degun-Mather (2006) cited Rothschild's (2006) assertion that there is a mind-body connection to burnout. This connection is rooted in the idea that mental well-being

is connected to physical well-being (Puig et al., 2012). As such, clinicians and counseling students alike need to maintain self-awareness in relationship to their physical and mental needs (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Despite most burnout in clinicians stemming from interactions with clients and caseloads (Craig & Sprang, 2010), burnout in counseling students is often rooted in academic rigor and expectations (Cieslak, 2016). For this research, I used an RCT lens to explore the experiences of burnout shared candidly by women of color who are mothers enrolled in online master's-level counseling programs. Ideally, the data gathered from what participants shared would provide insights into their experiences which in turn may illuminate needs counseling program developers, and policy makers can meet in the near future.

Online Education

According to Kentor (2015), online education has moved from novelty to necessity for many academic programs in recent years. Although traditional brick and mortar settings remain available, there is a growing drive for academic programs to offer courses via educational technology (i.e., online) (Kentor, 2015). In 2011, the Babson Survey Research Group conducted a study entitled "Going the Distance: Online education in the United States, 2011." In this study, researchers found that 31% of all students enrolled in higher education currently take at least one course online (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Kentor (2015) further asserted, "Online education is the fastest growing form of distance education" (p.30). Whereas this may be true, there remains a need to assess and examine the efficacy of the learning and teaching strategies used in online programs (Venter, 2003). Exploring this topic in detail is beyond the scope of the

currently proposed research. However, it is important to note that online learning programs continue to reevaluate and adjust based on professional standards as well as other educational criteria (Kentor, 2015).

Online learning, in a way, is a culture unto itself. Students are often expected to be self-motivators, have decent time-management skills, and be able to communicate effectively (Simpson, 2008). Although these traits are helpful for any student, online learners are assumed to have mastered these skills for the simple fact of how they are seeking to achieve their educational goals (Simpson, 2008). However, online learners often choose this mode of education for other reasons, such as work schedules or family obligations (Simpson, 2008). Ultimately, the choice to learn online does not mean a student is inherently capable of being successful in this setting. For example, individuals who prefer immediate feedback may not feel comfortable or confident in an asynchronous e-learning environment.

Phirangee (2016) reported that in spite of growing popularity, distance education continues to have high dropout rates. Though it seems pertinent that learning online is a choice, students who choose this mode of learning jump into a new culture of discussion boards, group chats, and having to communicate clearly without the auditory and visual cues most rely on in relating to others. Have you ever had a misunderstanding standing face to face with someone you know? It is not hard to imagine the difficulty experienced by those communicating with virtual strangers using a medium that does not often allow for many of the cues we are accustomed to having. In order to be successful, students

must think and communicate differently online than they would in any other face-to-face setting (Phirangee, 2016).

In addition to being its own culture, e-learning takes it one step further by being an insulated community. Traditionally, on brick and mortar campuses it is easy for students to intermingle with students from other professional and educational backgrounds; perhaps, running into each other at the student union or on the way to the library. Attending classes in a brick and mortar setting presents students with the opportunity to build relationships with people both in and outside of their primary course of study (Oguz, Chu, & Chow, 2015). In most e-learning environments, it is uncommon to be able to interact with individuals outside of one's designated courses. The exception to this may occur when a program has an academic residency. Residency is a brief period, typically a week in duration, when online students are required to meet face to face to fulfill the skills demonstration portions of their curriculum.

Social support is a necessity for success in higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Gaskell, 2008; Simpson, 2008). This statement holds true in the case of graduate-level counseling students in both traditional and online settings (Killian, 2008). When the students in question are MoCs, gaining an understanding of the impact social support can have on academic performance is essential. The need for social interaction by this population is not limited to feedback from instructors, but also includes exchanges with and support from peers.

Du et al. (2016) reported African American women in collaborative online learning expressed greater satisfaction with the learning process and outcomes when

there was active peer support. The authors went on to suggest that fairness and equity in social support and interactions held added importance for African American women (Du et al., 2016). Online learning, the type of support graduate students need, as well as personal struggles related to motherhood are all concerns that participants may have to navigate.

Online graduate student MoCs face challenges that are specific to them as well as the universal challenges online graduate students endure (Anaya, 2011; Lynch, 2008). Challenges of culture may include expectations related to the stereotypical idea that women of color can endure more than their non-ethnic counterparts as well as other negative race/gender stereotypes (Anaya, 2011, Collins, 1996; Du et al., 2016). Possible challenges specific to motherhood include finding and maintaining childcare, ability/inability to breastfeed, feelings of guilt or shame when unable to be with a child or meet one or more of the child's needs (Lynch, 2008). In addition to the challenges this population face by simply being mothers, participants are also online graduate students who must find a way to achieve a work/school-life balance (Lynch, 2008).

In general, students in online higher education, regardless of gender, frequently report feelings of isolation (Ali & Smith, 2015; Bichsel, 2013; Venter, 2003). Venter (2003) cited student accounts of feeling as though they did not belong and were disconnected from their classmates as well as their instructors when learning online. When students feel disconnected, they are less motivated and more likely to withdraw from online courses and programs, thereby increasing attrition rates (Ali & Smith, 2015). Although this is not always the case, Ali and Smith (2015) cite attrition as the primary

manifestation of social isolation. The proposed research will take a more in-depth look at the needs of students who are also mothers working toward their master's in an online learning environment.

Mothers in higher education

Although women are one of the fastest growing groups enrolling in graduate education programs, they have higher rates of attrition and fewer instances of achieving candidacy and graduation (Grenier and Burke 2008; Schultheiss, 2009; Springer et al., 2009). Lynch (2008) found that motherhood was a significant factor in the attrition of female graduate students in the United States. Historically, mothers in academia have had to choose between being successful in their careers and having a family (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). Tillman (2011) spoke candidly about the very real struggle female academicians have when considering and embarking upon the journey of motherhood. Graduate students who are already mothers must then deal with conflicts in their ability to prioritize within the culture of academia while simultaneously being "good mothers (Ellis, 2014)."

Researchers affirmed that even today, women are still responsible for a disproportionate amount of household duties and responsibilities (Anaya, 2011; Lynch, 2008; Schultheiss, 2009). Even in two-parent homes in which both parties work, childcare tends to be the "woman's responsibility" on top of any other work she may undertake (Schultheiss, 2009). The expectation of being a "good mother" is such that women are expected to work full time both inside and outside of their homes (Ellis, 2014). This expectation says nothing of the commitment to academia graduate students

must also make (Anaya, 2011). Although not every graduate student works while in school, the expectation remains that if you are in graduate school and work simultaneously, full time effort will apply in both areas (Ellis, 2014). But what about moms? What if the graduate student in question is a mother?

Whether single, co-habiting, or married, the expectations set upon mothers about caring for their children and homes are at minimum a full-time job (Schultheiss, 2009). Adding external employment has proven to provide no change to these expectations. Sadly, it seems the pursuit of education and academic goals follows suit. Graduate student mothers are routinely expected to expend full time energy and effort at home and school as well as at work when applicable (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). The demands of simultaneous full-time motherhood and graduate education are unrealistic at best and potentially damaging at worst (Schultheiss, 2009). The addition of part-time or full-time employment exacerbates this reality.

Graduate student mothers must continuously strive for balance in their lives while seeking to excel in their academic endeavors (Lynch, 2008). As it stands, graduate student mothers have a cumbersome burden to bear. On top of being mothers and students, MoCs have cultural expectations and ideals to which they and their families ascribe (Anaya, 2011). For example, a graduate student who is a single mom with Caucasian and African American ancestry raised in a lower middle socioeconomic level may struggle to raise her children independently and with little or no assistance because she feels as though asking for help or accepting government assistance will make her appear weak and lazy. Although founded in stereotypes, African American culture, at

times shuns the idea of asking for help, even when it is needed (Collins, 2000). Regardless of cultural interplay, mothers in higher education need the opportunity for understanding and support the proposed research presents. I hope that the information obtained throughout this investigation will aid in increasing the retention rates of all mothers seeking to further their educations.

How it all ties together

Many tout online learning as the future of education (Henry, 2011; Romero, 2011; Kentor, 2015). As such, it is imperative that we, as a profession, understand the needs and challenges faced by graduate students meeting academic goals online. Women of color make up a substantial portion of the overall population of counseling students and face unique challenges that may or may not present indicators for further concern. Mothers in higher education have been found to be at higher risk for attrition due to issues with work-life balance often stemming from a lack of support (Lynch, 2008). These figures also appear to be of relevance for women of color (Zeligman et al., 2015).

In this study, I sought to gain an understanding of the experiences of burnout in the population of women of color who are mothers completing a master's in MHC in an online learning environment. Qualitative interviews gave participants opportunities to share their individual experiences of burnout as well as how they managed burnout during their degree programs. The information obtained was used to develop an emerging theory about this population and their experiences and management of burnout. Ideally, the theory that emerged will have practical value for the evaluation and development of future clinical mental health programs. I hope that this research will help graduate

program developers lessen attrition for MoCs and garner a better understanding of students who occupy multiple life roles in general.

Summary and Transition

In Chapter 2, I provided a brief overview of the search strategy used to complete a review of the literature. Next, I presented a summary of recent literature on RCT, burnout, the growing popularity of online education, and mothers seeking higher education. In addition I explored literature findings focusing on women of color in academia and explained how all the preceding information ties together for the proposed study.

In the next chapter, I will present the research design, rationale, and questions. Following this, I will discuss the data collection methods I used, how participant selection occurred, and the role I assumed as the researcher. I will then present dialogue about the research lens, methods of data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. I will conclude the chapter with a summary and transition to Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

My goal in conducting this research was to add to the existing literature about graduate student burnout by providing data from a diverse group of current master's-level counseling students who have previously experienced or are currently experiencing burnout. My purpose in this study was to explore the unique experiences of burnout within the population of MoCs working toward their master's degree in CMHC online. I selected a qualitative, GT design over alternate research methods because it supported using the data that emerged from the study to inform the generation of a theory (Moss et al., 2014). In this chapter, I will present the research design and rationale, as well as the research questions. I will also discuss the data collection methods, participant selection, and my role as the researcher. I will then present dialogue on the research lens, methods of data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. I will conclude the chapter with a summary and transition.

Research Design and Rationale

Through this study, I explored the experiences of burnout by MoCs completing CACREP-accredited master's degrees in clinical mental health counseling online. In addition, I hoped to uncover how these mothers managed said burnout. After careful consideration of the three research paradigms: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, the research paradigm I used was qualitative. First, I recruited participants who self-identified as women of color who were mothers enrolled in or recently graduated from CACREP-accredited online CMHC programs, and who report having experienced

burnout within their graduate program. I recruited participants via the Walden University Research Participant Pool as well as through the American Counseling Association's COUNSGRADs graduate student listserv, and social media posts via Facebook.

Participants who met the inclusionary criteria and who chose to participate in the study completed the informed consent and a demographic survey. Demographic data helped to present a more distinct picture of the study participants and the diversity within the sample. Finally, I conducted qualitative interviews to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences of burnout. I collaborated with participants about their experiences as MoCs enrolled in an online CACREP-accredited CMHC program and managing burnout. I conducted an ongoing constant comparative analysis of the data during the data collection process to identify themes and patterns. I used the themes and patterns to explain how this population experienced and managed burnout. Data collection and analysis were simultaneous and repetitive in nature. I then revisited themes and patterns in the data with participants for further clarification and to allow the emergent theory to form.

The emergent theory was important because ideally, it provided a "well-codified set of propositions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; p. 31). I used the propositions to provide a tentative explanation of burnout as a phenomenon within this population (El Hussein et al., 2014). Existing theories and findings do not consider the inherent differences in the perspectives of women of color (Collins, 2000; Saulnier, 1996). I intended to present an emergent theory representative of this distinct viewpoint.

Through this study, I addressed the current lack of information about the actual experiences of online graduate student MoCs dealing with burnout and how they manage their symptoms (Elman & Forrest, 2004; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). It was my hope to understand the underlying reasons, and motivations participants had for the actions they took, provide insights into how the target population experienced and managed burnout, and illuminate possible trends related to their academic success and attrition rates (Patton, 2002). An abundance of the research conducted on burnout is quantitative for the simple fact that signs of stress, such as cortisol levels, are often measurable (Miller et al., 2011). Few researchers, if any, have taken the time to look at the actual experiences of individuals' who dealt with burnout.

GT

GT (GT) is a sociological method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). GT is an inductive methodology wherein researchers discover theory from gathered data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT researchers use a systematic and empirical approach to eliminate preconceptions and allow data to determine results (Glaser, 1998). I used the emergent theory generated by GT to explain the social behavior of the participants under consideration as well as how these participants resolved the specified phenomenon (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this study, the use of GT helped me to identify themes and patterns in the experiences of burnout by MoCs who were completing their master's online in a CACREP-accredited CMHC program to define an emergent theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

According to Charmaz (2003), GT methodology provides the researcher with a practical and flexible approach to interpreting qualitative data. Further, a GT design uses a case rather than a variable perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The use of a case perspective helped develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and its interaction with participants because each interview served as a case that was ultimately compared to and analyzed with other cases as opposed to looking for specific traits or variables in the data set.

I selected a GT design over other forms of inquiry because it specifically allowed me to use the data to drive discovery (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). GT relies on inductive logic to generate concepts that then lead to the development of a theory (El Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). For this research, I was not seeking to prove or disprove any theory; rather, I wanted to be able to develop a theory or explanation that expanded current knowledge about the experience of burnout, particularly for MoCs pursuing an online master's degree in counseling.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. How do women of color who are mothers completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?
2. How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online learning environment?

Data Collection Methods

Demographic survey. I collected basic demographic data using a brief demographic survey (see Appendix B.). Individuals who opted to participate in the study completed the survey. I included a hyperlink to the informed consent and survey at the bottom of the invitation to participate. The survey was used to gather information about participants' ages, identified ethnicities, martial statuses, employment statuses, number of children, and enrollment statuses. Demographic data helped provide a more detailed picture of any subsets of the research participants. Patterns and trends emerged from the demographic and suggested implications for future research. As I conducted a qualitative investigation, I sought to obtain a sample that would provide meaningful information and be representative of this population of students. Creswell (2013) recommended a sample size of 20 to 30 individuals to develop a well saturated theory, however, due to this being a more specific population, I was only able to recruit 6 participants. Understanding the demographic breakdown of the sample aided in illuminating the existence or lack of similarities with the target group.

Participant interviews. The primary method of data collection were phone interviews with participants that I recorded using an audio voice recorder. According to Mealer and Jones (2014), "face-to-face" interviewing is most commonly used in qualitative research. However, evidence supports the use of telephone interviewing. Researchers may limit emotional distress participants experience when discussing sensitive topics like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or in this case, burnout by utilizing telephone interviews (Mealer & Jones, 2014). I was able to use this form of

telecommunication to reach participants no matter where they were geographically-speaking.

As a method of inquiry, GT relies heavily on repetition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because of this, data collection and analysis was ongoing throughout the interview period. As themes and patterns emerged, I discussed key points and brought the themes and patterns into the interviews as additional points to explore more fully with participants. Due to this ongoing and cyclical process of analysis, I used follow-up interviews to ensure that I gathered data both correctly and to exhaustion. Initial interviews lasted between 35 and 75 minutes. Glaser and Strauss (1967) prescribed the use of memos during coding and the analysis of the data. My written notes and observations from the interviews included key words and phrases. This "bracketing" of ideas helped distinguish items that formed units of meaning or were recurring (Bednall, 2006). I expected follow-up interview lengths and frequencies to vary depending on participants' availability and how well the emerging theory captured participants' experiences and perspectives. I scheduled follow-up interviews with individual participants via their preferred method of contact. I continued to collect and analyze data until no new information was forthcoming, and I reached saturation by the recommendations made by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Audio recordings of the interviews helped during this process by allowing each participant to share her experiences of burnout candidly and in as much detail as possible. Participants were free to share who or what might have made their management of their experiences better or worse. I transcribed each audio recording, which, in addition to the

recordings themselves, diminished the potential for me to miss data that was only present when an interview is written out. Transcription also presented the opportunity to revisit the interviews for further analysis after they ended. Upon completion of data collection and analysis, I debriefed participants by discussing with them how I intended to use the information I gathered, and I offered to email them a summary of the completed study should they have an interest. Ideally, the data obtained provided me with some insight into participants' motivations, reasons, and opinions about their experiences of burnout and how they managed them.

Researcher's journal. I also keep a researcher's journal throughout the process to record my self-observations or reflections, thoughts, and biases (Creswell, 2013). All notes, memos, and reflective journal entries served to enrich the data by allowing concepts that stood out to be noticed as well as my sense of self and perspective to be incorporated into the research process. The journal helped as I processed my experience of investigating the research question and served as a system to check my own biases and assumptions.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

I used purposeful criterion sampling to ensure that the sample for the study was made up of individuals who were MoCs, were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited CMHC program online or graduated within the last 5 years, and who experienced burnout during their programs. The participants for this study needed to self-identify, using the operational definitions provided for MoCs and burnout. For this study, I defined MoCs as women who identify as belonging to a racial or ethnic group not categorized as White (of

European descent) who have at least one child for whom they provide/provided care. To qualify for the interview stage of this study, participants self-reported having experienced burnout at some point within their academic programs. The overall definition of burnout I used was negative symptoms individuals experienced within three specific dimensions: (a) personal accomplishment, (b) depersonalization, and (c) emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Wilkerson, 2009). However, as depersonalization is specific to interactions between helping professionals and their clients (Clark et al., 2009), I focused on students' experiences of the personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion dimensions. Individuals within the sample varied in age; however, each participant had at least completed a Bachelor's degree, as they were students in or recent graduates from online CACREP-accredited clinical mental health counseling master's programs. The sample population also came from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. All the participants identified as mothers with no differentiation between birth, foster, or adoptive.

Recruitment strategies. A recruitment letter explaining the research was disseminated via Walden University's Research Participant Pool (RPP), the American Counseling Association's COUNSGRADS Listserv, and various Facebook pages and groups to solicit willing participants (see Appendix A). Walden University's Research Participant Pool is a system designed to connect researchers with potential research participants. Researchers can set up an account and submit their research studies. Participants can also set up an account and login to the system to select research in which to participate, or they may receive an invitation to participate in research from Walden's

Research Center. Access to the RPP gave me access to students in Walden's Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program, which is a CACREP- accredited master's level online counseling program. The American Counseling Association's COUNSGRADS Listserv is an email list of active members, which includes graduate student members. In some cases, graduate programs require students to become members of ACA. I used this list to provide an additional avenue to find active graduate students who were willing to participate in this research effort. Finally, Facebook has a number of counseling focused pages and groups for both students and professionals. Each page is run by an administrator who actively ensures that posts to the group are within the realm of what the group stands for or hopes to discuss.

Individuals who had access to the Research Participant pool could self-select as a participant in the research study based on a brief description of the inquiry given on the Participant Pool website as well as the eligibility requirements set. Interested individuals could click on a link to an online explanation of the informed consent process and the demographic survey. Individuals who were a part of the Walden University's counseling student Listserv, as well as individuals on ACA's Listserv, received an emailed recruitment letter. I provided potential participants with an explanation of the purpose of the research, as well as an electronically signed informed consent.

I invited participants to self-select based on the criteria of being a MoC while actively enrolled in or recently graduated from an online CACREP-accredited CMHC program at the time of the study and having experienced burnout at some time during their academic program. Individuals who identified themselves as meeting the criteria for

selection and agreed to serve as participants selected an option to agree to participation electronically and then completed a demographic survey (see Appendix B). I invited participants to share their preferred availability and contact information should they desire to continue to assist in the study. The interviews took place via telephone and at participants' convenience. In addition, I audio recorded the interviews to ensure that the details provided remained accessible and that I could revisit them at a later time for further scrutiny.

I followed a basic interview protocol (See Appendix C), but kept the interviews flexible enough to allow for the discovery of new ideas and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I transcribed all the participant interviews. I expected to conduct follow-up interviews to clarify or expand on gathered data as my ongoing analysis revealed categories or theoretical notions that I needed to discuss further with participants. Due to the nature of the study, I collected and analyzed data simultaneously which meant that I needed to contact participants multiple times via the preferred method of contact the participant indicated (phone or email) to inquire about clarification and discuss concepts and phrases that stood out. Although I used a semi-structure for the initial interviews, I allowed the follow-up interviews and communication to be organic in nature and scheduled with the participant via email or at the conclusion of the initial interview.

Role of the Researcher

As a MoC who completed my master's degree in Mental Health Counseling online in 2011, and currently completing my Ph.D. in the same manner, I have similar experiences to those experienced by the participants in the study. There have also been a

few occasions when I have experienced symptoms of burnout. Although it was important for me to be aware of my biases and predispositions throughout the research process, having similar experiences allowed me to connect with participants, which in turn acted as a catalyst for mutual understanding and growth (Hall, Barden, & Conley, 2014). Using an RCT lens gave me the opportunity to relate to participants while being wholly authentic as a researcher. In this role, I made every effort to be genuine in my interactions with participants so that they could feel safe and comfortable, which encouraged them to approach their answers to the interview questions candidly. I actively worked to obtain qualified participants, conduct interviews, record observations, and review and analyze the data thoroughly.

As the researcher, I was central to the interpretation of the data (Bednall, 2006). I used an ongoing analytic process or epoche, as well as bracketing to synthesize the data obtained and observations made (Bednall, 2006; Patton 2002). Bednall (2006) described the employment of a period of reflection in which a researcher thinks self-consciously throughout the research process and actively recollects personal life experiences that come to mind about the research topic. These recollections reflect potential bias (Bednall, 2006). I employed a similar practice when engaging in the research process; however, due to the research topic, I added a brief, 5 min period of meditation to relax, clear my mind, and prepare to be open to the interaction with each participant. I maintained a reflective research journal to examine my journey as the researcher and to illuminate the areas where my biases lie.

Researcher Biases

As the researcher, my background and personal experiences can lead to bias in the research process. Potential biases I brought to the study included the fact that I am a multiethnic woman of color. I am of Panamanian and African-American descent, and I completed my master's of science in Mental Health Counseling online while growing my family. I am a wife and mother of three children, ages 12, 10, and 7 at the time of this research. I began my graduate studies in 2008, a year after the birth of my oldest son. That same year, I became pregnant, and I delivered my second son in the summer of 2009. Ultimately, my master's degree conferred in February 2011. My struggles and experiences, as well as my discussions and interactions with other mothers throughout their academic progression, fed my curiosity as to how other MoCs seeking higher education negotiated these roles within their own lives.

As a woman of color, a mother, and a graduate student myself, I had a number of inherent researcher biases. However, these biases seem to parallel current findings in the available literature. Specifically, women feeling torn between sacrificing family and advancing their careers (Zeligman et al., 2015; Philipsen, 2010) and women retaining most of the responsibility for childrearing in addition to any paid employment (Kibelloh & Bao, 2014; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). Furthermore, although completing graduate education online provides additional flexibility, it can and often does distort boundaries for self-care and increase feelings of isolation (Holm et al., 2015; Philipsen, 2010).

Methods of Data Analysis

The primary objective of GT is to generate a theory from the data (Moss et al., 2014). I used the constant comparative method of data analysis to analyze data gathered from the interviews. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the interview period of the data collection process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), comparative analysis requires the researcher to group data and check it against data collected earlier. Constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to generate theory systematically (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, as I was seeking information on the experiences of burnout in this population, some of the events or feelings participants reported might present as seemingly cause and effect or levels of distress.

Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) proposed method of constant comparative analysis, I made notes and grouped information into categories throughout the interview and data collection process. The use of memos throughout this process allowed for creativity and freedom in content and form (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). According to Glaser (1998), researchers could use memos to capture ideas during interviews that they can revisit while coding the data. Revisiting memos during coding may help in conceptualizing and creating code categories or groupings (Glaser, 1998).

These steps took place during the interviews because it allowed me to actively check in with participants, which was essential to ensure that the themes and categories were in fact representative of their experiences (Elliot & Lazenbatt, 2005).

This "member checking" was an on-going cyclical aspect of the data collection and analysis process (Elliot & Lazenbatt, 2005). I intended to allow participants to review my interpretation of the data by sharing the ideas and information (memos) that stood out to me or that I found repeating over the course of interviews. I inquired as to how the information resonated with participants and whether they believed it was representative of their thoughts and feelings on the subject matter. In addition I followed up with participants after I coded the initial data to find out if I was accurately describing their experiences, and I made adjustments based on their responses. Once I established categories and the information was confirmed through member checking, I integrated the data by using similarities found between and within categories continually verifying with interviewees as new categories emerged.

The integrated categories then lend themselves to delimiting the emergent theory into general terminology. As broad as burnout as a topic can be, the experiences and descriptions provided by participants helped shape and whittle down the terms that were the building blocks of theory. Lastly, I worked to express major themes in a systematic framework that made an emergent theory targeted to this population. This method of analysis aided me in generating a theory that was plausible, consistent, and integrated while being "close to the data (p.103)" and has the potential to be operationalized for future inquiries per Glaser and Strauss (1967).

For this study, I sorted, labeled, and filed voice recordings and transcriptions (Patton, 2002). I also recorded the information gathered from the demographic questionnaires. The nominal data obtained (e.g., races, graduate status) was compiled as

well. I used *NVivo,* a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software (CAQDAS), to store, organize, and further analyze the hand-coded data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I used constant comparative analysis as previously noted, and I also coded the data into as many codes as possible (i.e., incident by incident, concept to concept) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Researchers must consider issues of trustworthiness when conducting qualitative research. Issues of trustworthiness include transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Creswell, 2013). Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Patton, 2002). Chametzky (2013) described transferability as the ability to apply the theory relevantly to an area outside of the study parameters. I utilized thick description to aid in increasing the likelihood of transferability. Thick description is highly detailed and helps to create a full mental picture of an experience (Creswell, 2013). Credibility refers to believability, which greatly depends on the rigor, skill, and competence of the researcher (Patton, 2002). I worked to establish credibility in various ways. Specifically, I used member checking and peer debriefing (Loh, 2013). According to Loh (2013), confirmability attests that findings and interpretations are supported by the data. I used reflection to ensure that the gathered data supports the findings and interpretations and not my personal opinions or assumptions. Lastly, dependability is the consistency of the process used to conduct the inquiry (Loh, 2013; Shenton, 2004). I used a basic interview protocol with specific questions I asked each participant. However, outside of making sure to ask

those questions at some point, the flow of the interview was dependent upon the participant. A study has dependability when it can be recreated in the same context with the same participants and methods and have similar results (Loh, 2013; Shenton, 2002). Researcher-established credibility largely influences the dependability of a study (Shenton, 2002).

Traditional issues of trustworthiness are generally of less concern when using GT because the goal of the research is not to prove or disprove, but to generate an emergent theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This theory emerged directly from participant interview data. Constant comparative analysis, as prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), contributed inherent validity due to achieving saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new codes are forthcoming, there is enough information to replicate the study, and there is the ability to obtain new additional information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) affirmed the importance of reaching data saturation because of the impact it has on the quality of research. I reached saturation with the collected data once the follow-up question was asked, and participants began to reiterate previous responses, which demonstrated that no new information was forthcoming.

Whereas traditional issues of trustworthiness are of less concern, Chametzky (2013) affirmed the emphasis placed on five elements in the evaluation of a GT study: grab, fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability. Grab is the ability of the study to get a person's attention or when the audience understands the study (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998). Fit is the connection expressed between a concept and the conceptualized data (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998). RCT ties into this by way of

the experiences of the MoCs. Relevance is the importance the study has to people (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998). Burnout in this population is particularly relevant as there is a clear shift in the way we as a society are obtaining our educations as well as in the increasing diversity of the population. Workability is the ability of a study to be "multi-dimensional" enough to handle variations within a subject area (Chametsky, 2013). Modifiability is the ability of a study to adapt or be flexible to the incorporation of new data (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998). I worked diligently to ensure the study exhibited each of these elements. All in all, the preceding elements combined to establish the overall trustworthiness of the final qualitative GT study.

Ethical considerations

Addressing ethical concerns is an important aspect of any research process (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). During this study, I adhered to ACA ethical standards in research (ACA, 2014). While executing the research, I initiated the informed consent process before having individuals complete any aspect of the study by including a link in the invitation that will provide an electronic informed consent they could sign electronicall and send back. I also made sure to reiterate informed consent verbally and periodically throughout the research process during my interviews and interactions with participants (ACA, 2014). In addition I made supplementary efforts to ensure all data and recordings were secure and did not have easily decipherable means of identifying participants (ACA, 2014).

I secured any hard copies of information, such as my notes, or computer files via locked files and password protection and will maintain them for 5 years per Walden

University's research policy. I also made it a point to inform participants of their rights to confidentiality and the measures I put in place to protect their information. Specifically, I did not maintain copies of recordings after completing the transcriptions of the interviews. I further ensured that all identifying information was removed and use alpha-numeric codes as the only means of identification. Finally, I would freely remove information should the participants no longer like to share or would provide a copy of their data, should they request one.

I made certain to practice ethical behaviors in my interactions with participants. The research was qualitative, and as such, researcher bias is inherent (Moss et al., 2014). However, intrinsic, I actively used a process of self-awareness and reflection to ensure that I knew my biases and clearly documented them throughout the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I continually reassessed for potential biases throughout the interview process, and I monitored and evaluated the appropriateness of the language used in my interviews and on all documentation (Patton, 2002).

Furthermore, I enlist my chair as a third party to review my data and results for bias (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2008). I employed a system of participant check-ins to ascertain participants' continued willingness to contribute to this research effort. Although it was ideal that all participants completed the entire study, I ensured that participants were aware that they were free to end their participation in the study at any time and for any reason (ACA, 2014). Lastly, I made sure to debrief participants and provide contact information should they desire to reach me (Patton, 2002).

Concerns that could have arisen while conducting this study included individuals' stress responses to talking about their experiences of burnout, nervousness from being interviewed, and the inability to continue. I intended to address such concerns by reiterating the voluntary nature of the study and ensuring that participants were aware that they are free to withdraw from the research at any time (ACA, 2014). These scenarios did not present as concerns during the study. Finally, I had information on the official website for the National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov, available in case participants needed resources.

Summary and Transition

A qualitative research design was used to gain an understanding of the experiences of burnout in MoCs working on their master's in a CACREP-accredited online clinical mental health counseling program. This study was relevant because of the increase in online counseling programs and the professional imperative to gain a better understanding of diverse populations experiencing burnout. The primary research questions were: "How do women of color who are mothers completing a CACREP-accredited master's in clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) in an online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?" and "How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a CACREP-accredited master's in clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) in an online learning environment?"

I invited participants to participate via ACA's COUNSGRADS Listserv, Facebook, and Walden's Research Participant Pool but self-identified as being MoCs and having experienced burnout during their academic programs. I collected qualitative data

from participants via demographic surveys and participant interviews using audio/visual technology. Data collection and analysis was cyclical and simultaneous. I was the sole researcher and conducted the interviews, coding, and analysis of the data myself. I brought an abundance of experience and empathy to this research effort and did my best to follow all ethical guidelines throughout this process.

In the next chapter, I will present an in-depth description of the actual study as conducted. I will begin with an overview of the study setting and demographics. Next, I will provide information on the data collection and analysis process. I will then present evidence of trustworthiness and the results obtained. I will conclude the chapter with a summary and transition to Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

My purpose in this qualitative, GT study was to understand the experiences and management of burnout by MoCs in CACREP-accredited CMHC programs online. To achieve this goal, I used two primary research questions and companion subquestions, which encouraged participants to expound more fully on their experiences. The primary research questions were: "How do women of color who are mothers completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in a CACREP-accredited online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?" and "How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online CACREP-accredited learning environment?" In this chapter, I review the research setting, participants' demographics, and other details of the data collection. I then provide an analysis of the data, the evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study. I conclude with a summary of the chapter.

Setting

I interviewed each of the six participants via phone and used the recording capabilities of my laptop to record each interview as it occurred. During each interview, I was ensconced in a secured room and was able to ensure privacy and no interruptions on my end. Four of the participants also noted being in a place that ensured their privacy or at least being alone and free to speak. One participant noted that her daughter was reading in the same room but was unaffected by her presence and continued with the interview. Another participant had to excuse herself briefly due to her dog barking because he

wanted her attention. Once she removed him from the room, she apologized but was then able to come back to the interview and give her undivided attention.

Prior to the interviews, I collected informed consent forms and demographic data using SurveyMonkey. Even though I anticipated the interviews taking anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes, the actual lengths of the interviews were between 35 and 75 minutes. I called participants on the phone numbers they provided at the agreed-upon times. During each interview, I took notes by hand. Upon completion of the initial interviews, I made an offer to go over transcripts and complete a member check. I reached out to participants via their preferred method of contact to reiterate the offer to go over transcripts once they were completed and to present follow-up questions. Of the six participants, half responded to the request. Of the three, none believed there needed to be any changes made to the transcripts, and each responded to the follow-up question. Finally, I maintained a researcher's journal throughout the study to help me keep a record of my experiences and reflections along the way.

Demographics

A demographic overview of participants is shown in Table 1. I had a total of six participants. All my participants identified as MoCs. Each participant either graduated from a CACREP-accredited CMHC program online within the last 5 years, or they were currently enrolled. All participants self-reported experiencing burnout during or throughout their CMHC programs. Two participants identified as married, three identified as single, and the other identified as divorced. Two participants identified as stay-at-home mothers (SAHM), whereas the other four participants worked full-time

outside of their homes while completing their degree programs. Three participants' ages ranged from 31 to 40 years. Another two participants' ages were in the 41- to 50-year range, and one participant was older than 50 years. One participant identified as Asian, more specifically Malaysian, second-generation Chinese. Three participants identified as African-American and two participants identified as having multiple ethnicities that were African-American and Hispanic: one African-American and Puerto-Rican and the other African-American and Nicaraguan. I used pseudonyms to ensure privacy and confidentiality. I gave participants the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms, although most opted to leave the selection of their pseudonyms to me.

Table 1

Demographic Overview of Participants

Participant #	Ethnicity	Marital status	Age (y)	# of children	Enrollment status	Employment status
1	Asian	Married	41-50	1-2	Full time	SAHM
2	African-American	Married	31-40	1-2	Graduated	Full time
3	African-American/ Hispanic	Divorced	31-40	1-2	Graduated	Full time
4	African-American/ Hispanic	Single	50+	1-2	Full time	Full time
5	African-American	Single	41-50	3-4	Graduated	Full time
6	African-American	Single	31-40	1-2	Full time	SAHM

Participant Profiles

Participant 1: Lina

Profile. Lina was a Malaysian immigrant mother of Chinese descent, nearing the end of her master's program. She indicated her age fell within the 41- to 50-year old age range. Lina reported being married with one child living in her home. Lina was a full-time student and a stay-at-home mom.

Interview and impressions. During the initial greeting, Lina seemed friendly, although somewhat soft spoken. She reported being forwarded the study information from a friend who saw it online and thought she might be interested. Lina did not have any questions about the informed consent or any trouble understanding her ability to stop participating at any time. She seemed open to beginning the interview quickly. Lina was soft spoken but laughed easily, and as the interview progressed, she seemed to relax and became more animated. Lina spoke candidly about her experiences and process. Lina shared that she immigrated to the United States as an adult in 2007. Being a recent immigrant, Lina recognized that there were some aspects of American culture that she did not know, but when it came to building rapport and making connections both in school and as a counselor in training, she reported her ability to show concern and be authentic had gotten her through.

Participant 2: Tameka

Profile. Tameka was an African-American mother who recently graduated from her online CMHC program. She indicated her age fell within the 31- to 40-year old age range. Tameka reported being married with two children living at home. Tameka worked full-time.

Interview and impressions. During the initial greeting, Tameka spoke quietly but seemed to speak louder and relax more as the interview progressed. She found out about the study from a friend who attended Walden University. Tameka reported having no questions about the informed consent and understanding her right to discontinue participation at any time. She spoke freely about her experiences, especially about her decision to pursue her degrees online. Tameka gave detailed but concise responses to each question and elaborated accordingly. She was the only participant who indicated feeling as though her ethnicity did not impact her experience as a graduate student.

Participant 3: Sandra

Profile. Sandra self-identified as an African-American and Hispanic mother of Nicaraguan descent. However, she also reported immigrating to the United States as a child, at approximately 10 years old. Sandra indicated her age fell within the 31- to 40 years of age range. She reported being divorced with two children living at home. Sandra was a recent graduate and worked full-time.

Interview and impressions. Sandra reported being referred to the study by a friend who saw the study recruitment flyer posted on Facebook. During the initial greeting, she indicated that she did not have any questions about the informed consent process and was ready to begin the interview. Sandra had a clear, strong voice and came across as confident throughout the interview. She shared her experiences freely and thoughtfully. Sandra and her family immigrated to the United States, seeking political asylum when she was a child. She indicated that this combination of her Nicaraguan roots and American upbringing gave her "grit" and helped shape her expectations. Sandra

credited her children with being her main source of motivation and relied on her faith to keep her "grounded."

Participant 4: Dee Dee

Profile. Dee Dee was an African-American and Hispanic mother of Puerto Rican descent. She indicated that her age fell in the 50+ year old age range. Dee Dee identified as being single and having one adult child and one grandchild living in her home. She was a full-time student while working full-time.

Interview and impressions. Dee Dee was the only participant who selected her own pseudonym. She was referred to the study by a friend who thought she might qualify. Dee Dee reported having no questions about the informed consent and understanding her right to discontinue participation at any time. She exuded enthusiasm from the instant contact was made. During the initial greeting, Dee Dee spoke clearly and with confidence. She was not soft spoken or overly loud but had a pleasantly calm voice. It became clear early on that Dee Dee was not afraid to laugh or to share her experiences with extreme candor. I felt myself enjoying our connection immensely and having the desire to keep in touch.

Participant 5: Kathy

Profile. Kathy was an African-American mother who recently graduated with her MS. She indicated that her age fell within the 41-50 years old age range. Kathy identified as being single and having three foster children living in her home as well as having an adult daughter who was married who lived with her spouse and child in another city. She also worked full time.

Interview and impressions. Kathy was referred to the study by one of her co-workers. Upon the initial greeting, I noted that she spoke clearly, confidently, and with a moderate tone of voice. Though she was not soft spoken, she did not yell or need to speak overly loudly to express herself or come across with an air of leadership. Kathy reported having no questions about the informed consent and seemed happy to engage almost immediately. She provided extremely detailed, in-depth answers for each question and sub question posed. Kathy was not timid in her responses and came across as eager to share her experiences. She also laughed easily, and I found myself connecting to her quickly. At the end of the interview, Kathy noted that the interview process had been enjoyable for her and in some ways even felt therapeutic.

Participant 6: Mable

Profile. Mable was an African-American mother of two. She noted that one of her children had profound special needs. Mable indicated that her age fell within the 31-40 years old age range. She identified as being single but having a boyfriend who lived outside of the home. Mable was a full-time student and a stay-at-home mom.

Interview and impressions. Upon the initial greeting, it was clear that Mable was excited to participate. She informed me that she saw the post for my study in an email from the COUNSGRADS listserv and was enthusiastic about her ability to share her experiences. Mable did not have any questions about the informed consent process. She had a soft tone of voice but laughed easily and seemed comfortable sharing her thoughts openly. Mable reported being a stay-at-home mom while attending school due to having a son with profound special needs who was both non-verbal and non-ambulatory and who

needed constant care. She also noted that even though her mom lived nearby in senior apartments, she also served as a caretaker for her mother. Mable shared her experiences with extreme candor and expressed interest in ultimately using her degree to establish support for caretakers. Mable reported having made it this far in her program "by the Grace of God."

Data Collection

This was a qualitative GT study that I conducted on my own. As the sole researcher, I recruited and interviewed participants, completed all transcriptions, and coded all data. I used Survey Monkey for the informed consent and the collection of demographic data by providing a link to participants, which allowed them to give consent and then complete the demographic survey prior to scheduling an interview time with me. I collected all study data over 5 months, with ongoing analysis beginning after the first participant interview was completed. I labeled audio files with a two-letter code that was unrelated to any identifying information and was solely for my use. I kept all recordings in a locked file on my password-protected personal laptop. In addition, I utilized the two-letter code to aid in maintaining order, but no other identifying information was recorded by hand. I stored all hand written notes in an unmarked folder in a locked file cabinet in my personal home office.

A notable issue I faced during the data collection and analysis phase of this study was a poor response to the call for participants. The lack of initial response could be explained by my lack of understanding of the process for using the Walden Research Participant Pool (RPP). Upon receipt of IRB approval, in mid-December, I did not realize

the requirement fo an additional submission process and approval time to post a study to the RPP. However, once I completed that process and the initial call to participants was put out, near the end of December, there was still no response or interest garnered via this medium. After further investigation, I realized the RPP did not include a user-friendly way to demonstrate an interest in participating. I attempted to circumvent this issue by including the Survey Monkey link to the demographic survey in the posted study description.

Ultimately, after having the study up on the RPP and being unsuccessful in garnering any participants after a month, I completed the process of submitting a change to my procedures in order to post my study information using my personal Facebook page and group memberships. After another month using the RPP, making weekly posts on Facebook, and only having found one participant, I submitted another change to my procedures to include the use of the COUNSGRADS listserv as a way of disseminating my research invitation. I continued to make weekly posts or reposts on the various Facebook pages to which I was a member as well as having shared the invitation via the RPP and the COUNSGRADS listserv.

Eventually, another month passed with no inquiries or new participants. As a result, I submitted a final change to my procedures, asking the IRB to allow me to expand my participant parameters to include potential participants who recently graduated. For the purpose of this study, recent was defined as having graduated within the last 5 years. After this change was approved, I was able to recruit four new participants in quick succession. I continued to make weekly or biweekly posts and reposts, depending on

what the Facebook group pages allowed. I also reposted in the COUNSGRADS listserv, and the study remained active on the Walden University RPP. After the initial influx of new participants, another month of posting and reposting led to a final participant being found. Throughout this process, there were a few other individuals who showed interest in the study, but for one reason or another, they did not qualify.

Each interview was conducted via a direct phone call from myself to the participant on the phone number they provided. I placed the calls on speaker and recorded the interviews via the voice recorder on my laptop. In three of the six interviews, there were brief instances where the phone lines had issues, and either the participant was unable to hear me, or I was unable to hear them. Thankfully, the issues resolved themselves quickly and no further actions were needed to correct the issues or compensate for the disruptions aside from a reiteration of the question or answer that was being given at the time of the interruption.

I employed a semi-structured interview format, ensuring that each question on the interview protocol was answered either directly or indirectly, but not necessarily in a specific order. I used a basic interview protocol, (see Appendix C) with specific questions I asked each participant. However, based on the flow of the interviews, participants answered some questions without my asking. In those instances, I made sure to use reflection to confirm answers with participants. Upon confirmation, I then asked if there were any additional thoughts or information they wanted to add or share in response to the unasked question.

Data Analysis

As this study was a qualitative GT, I used a constant comparative analysis of the data. My data analysis began immediately following the first interview and continued throughout the subsequent interviews and transcription process. I interviewed participants, taking notes, and making memos throughout each interview. Each participant interview provided thick and rich descriptions. Upon completion of the interviews, I began the process of transcribing each audio file.

I completed each transcription verbatim. In order to transcribe the audio files, I listened to each interview repeatedly, stopping and restarting the audio file frequently to ensure I captured all the dialogue as it played. I made sure to include all auditory cues, such as pausing, non-verbal sounds, and laughter to make each transcription as detailed and representative of the interviews as possible. Each transcription took anywhere from 7 to 15 hours to complete. Although the transcription process was both arduous and tedious, I believe it to have been essential to my immersion and familiarity with the data. I spent many hours reading and coding data, and as a result, I was fully able to engage and reflect on the information each participant provided.

I then read and hand coded each transcript, rereading and comparing them one to another. Through this process, I developed substantive preliminary codes. I used this ongoing comparative analysis of data to aid in finding clear threads and patterns across interviews. Finally, I uploaded the transcripts, interview notes, and hand coding into my NVivo software. NVivo aided in my organization of the data and my ability to further comb through the data from multiple participants in one place. I ultimately took the loose

groupings of code and transitioned them into more defined categories or themes. Through this process, the following themes emerged: (a) The struggle is real (b) Alone/Isolation (c) Bottoming out (d) Doing what needs to be done (e) Pressure to perform (f) Learning for life (g) Self-care: Yeah, right! (h) Faith and God's grace.

Discrepancies

I coded and analyzed all participant data using constant comparative data analysis and did not find any discrepant cases or non-conforming data. As this was a GT study, I used all of the data I transcribed and coded to help ground and formulate the emergent theory.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to a naturalistic approach to validation (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The validation or validity of a study is the measure of how well the design and constructs of a study achieve their intended goals (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007). For example, if a research study was designed to measure stress levels, but the results instead measured anxiety levels, that study would lack trustworthiness. Traditional issues of trustworthiness are of less concern when conducting a qualitative GT study than in quantitative research because the goal of the research is not to prove or disprove but rather to generate an emergent theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Shenton, 2004). I have done my best to ensure aspects of qualitative trustworthiness were met in this study by actively interweaving qualities of trustworthiness such as transferability, credibility, and confirmability throughout the research process.

Transferability in research implies a level applicability to areas outside of the original context (Malterud et al., 2016). Chametzky (2013) described transferability as the ability to apply a theory relevantly to an area outside of study parameters. In this case, I used thick, rich descriptions provided by the participants to aid in increasing the likelihood of transferability. Ideally, these descriptions would allow others to relate to participants' experiences, which in turn might allow the emergent theory to apply to a somewhat broader population, even if it does not apply to the majority at large (Malterud et al., 2016). For example, the theory may also hold true for MoCs in online Ph.D. programs or non-counseling profession programs.

Credibility refers to the correctness of a description (Maxwell, 2013). I established my credibility as a researcher by demonstrating my competence and attention to detail throughout the data collection and analysis process (Patton, 2002). I used member checking throughout the data collection process to ensure the data I gathered was representative of what my participants intended to share (Loh, 2013). Upon completion of each transcript, I reached out to participants via their preferred method of contact to offer copies of transcripts and to present any follow-up questions. I gave participants the opportunity to review the transcripts, to provide context, or alternate interpretations as they saw fit (Loh, 2013). Three participants responded to the follow-up questions, and no participants requested any changes be made to their transcripts. In addition I triangulated the data by using constant comparative data analysis. This form of analysis required me to compare each transcript one to another and to look at the same data gathered from

different participants. Finally, I made sure to use direct quotes from the transcripts throughout the data analysis and coding process.

Confirmability is the extent to which findings are supported by the data (Miles et al., 2014). I demonstrated confirmability by ensuring that all the emergent themes and resulting interpretations were fully grounded in the data participants provided (Loh, 2013). For example, all the MoCs I interviewed shared the aspects of their online graduate experience where they struggled, which led to the theme entitled "The struggle is real." I maintained a researcher's journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to record my thoughts and impressions and to help me avoid applying my personal assumptions to participant data. Journals such as these are often recommended to ensure that researchers maintain awareness of their worldviews and biases as they interpret data and present findings (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2002). Lastly, I established the dependability of my study by using an interview protocol and ensuring that each participant answered each of the intended questions, although not in any particular order.

According to Chametzky (2013), five elements may be described for the evaluation of a GT study:

- grab
- fit
- relevance
- workability
- modifiability

I believe I fulfilled each area with the process of my research. The grab of this study was demonstrated by the fact that burnout is a salient topic, and many academicians remain intrigued by new and diversified information on this topic (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998). A number of recent articles Bray (2015), Kibelloh & Bao (2014), Lee et al. (2010), and Zeligman et al. (2015) reference the need for more research in this area. I also made sure to present the information concisely and in a manner that was easily understandable for my audience (Glaser, 1998). I established the fit of my study by ensuring that the concept of burnout was expressed through the direct descriptions of burnout experiences provided by participants (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998).

I maintained the relevance of this study by finding support in the literature that stated burnout remains germane as a research topic (Cieslak, 2016; Craig & Sprang, 2010; Wilkerson, 2009). In addition existing literature supports the need for diversity in further investigations of burnout, i.e., in online students, in MoCs, in students and graduates as opposed to practicing clinicians (Clark et al., 2009; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016; Zeligman et al., 2015). The proposed research was particularly salient as our society has become increasingly diverse. I demonstrated both the workability and the modifiability of the study by expressing the recommendations to conduct the study again with Ph.D. students or students from other professional backgrounds (Chametzky, 2013; Glaser, 1998). It is clear to me that the idea behind the study is "multi-dimensional" enough to handle variations within the topic of burnout and may ultimately strengthen the empirical data available (Chametsky, 2013).

Findings

The goal of GT research is the development of an emergent theory that is completely derived from the data, i.e., grounded in the perspectives and experiences of the participants. The primary research question for this study was: "How do women of color who are mothers completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in a CACREP-accredited online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?" The secondary research question was: "How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online CACREP-accredited learning environment?" I asked additional sub-questions in order to obtain highly detailed, or thick and rich, descriptions of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I collected data from six participants. All participants self-identified as MoCs who were either in or recently graduated from CACREP-accredited online CMHC programs and experienced burnout during their programs. Although I did not specifically ask, I was made aware that at least seven different online CACREP-accredited programs were represented, as one participant completed multiple degrees online and yet another participant noted starting at one program, but ultimately taking time off and being in the midst of finishing at a different program.

The constant comparative analysis of participants' responses to the primary research questions as well as the additional sub-questions led to the development of thick and rich descriptions. The following themes emerged from those descriptions: (a) The struggle is real (b) Alone/Isolation (c) Bottoming out (d) Doing what needs to be done (e)

Pressure to perform (f) Learning for life (g) Self-care: Yeah, right! (h) Faith and God's grace. These themes represented the commonalities in the experiences of burnout by participants.

Theme 1: The Struggle is real

Completing a master's degree comes with an inherent commitment to learning and an expected course load. However, these expected exertions were understandably exacerbated by participants' real-life setbacks and struggles. None of the women I interviewed had a completely smooth process while working on their degrees. Some participants faced unavoidable personal concerns, such as health issues and hospitalizations. Other participants had to maneuver through issues with meeting program requirements such as finding practicum and internship sites. Some of the participants experienced problems with both. Though every mother faced concerns related to the completion of their degrees, each one found themselves embattled and working through various trials during their educational processes. Mable, an African-American single mother of two children, described her struggle, noting, "One of the things that I struggle with primarily would be balance. Trying to satisfy my requirements for school and my parental requirements and I am a single mother, so that is one aspect that compounds it."

Lina described one of her more frustrating experiences related to having to extend her internship stating:

> So yeah, that was the real struggle because you know I was doing so well in all the classes and then like the only thing that was holding me back was the hours.

> So I couldn't get the direct hours, and you know as a mom, and you know you're thinking like oh my goodness. So you know because I was doing the online program is also because uh well my husband and I…one of us had to get back into the job market quickly. And so it was a real setback, so you know when you think of that financial burden, it's like one more year come on!

Lina was frustrated by her inability to complete the hour requirement in the allotted terms. She also noted the situation led to an added financial burden that she and her husband were not anticipating. Similarly, Dee Dee expressed one of her struggles with meeting academic goals saying:

> This takes so much out of you and then when you're an older adult, it really doesn't help. Probably like a lot of my other peers that are doing it…I fall asleep in the chair with my books and my dog and.… you know I take two classes per quarter, and you can have discussion boards due for both classes on the same day. Which only gives you a limited amount of time to read the material and then to write a discussion that makes sense and then the citations from each. Oh, my God! To make sure you don't mix them up.

Dee Dee suggested, in her experience, the rigor of being in an online program was compounded by her being in the 50 and up age range.

Similarly, Sandra talked about her struggle with balancing her responsibilities as a mom during her degree program while also noting the additional challenge of attending residency:

> You know some of the challenges that I had were probably having to work a little later in a separate, somewhat different homework time, dinner time, extracurricular time and then having to come home and then stay up kind of late and get assignments done. So that was a bit of a challenge. One time, just having to be gone for a program that was not necessarily completely online. Still having to be there at certain times, just having to manage time and take on the additional tasks. That can sometimes be personally stressful. So it is an issue of just trying to juggle everything.

Kathy chronicled her experience and struggles as a student and single foster mom of three, faced with the practicum and internship requirements for her online program noting:

> The academics was not the problem. It was the internship. I mean I enjoyed my internship. My internship for mental health counseling was with domestic violence. I worked in the shelter, and I interned in the shelter and the outreach center. But it all realigns to another problem, even after I got started, I needed to do…150 hours for my practicum, and 300 hours for each internship….which is really a hardship having children and even just having my one child and doing internship especially if you couple that with the fact that you may have to work and in both cases, I worked full time. Just the difficulty of getting off work, getting a child, getting them settled somewhere where they're going to be safe, getting to your internship… it was quite a sacrifice.… It became very difficult.

Finally, Tameka spoke of her difficulties embarking upon her master's while pregnant, having a young child at home, and still working full time:

> It was a struggle. I end up being pregnant… with my second child. And it was hard 'cause I mean of course you have deadlines and stuff you have to do, and then I was working. I was also working full-time… I would say the course work itself wasn't bad but when it got down to completing the hours that I needed to finish the program that was really tough because I was still working full time and I still had to make time to get those hours in.

Although each participant shared different struggles at different times in their academic programs, they all shared in the feeling of being overwhelmed which is characteristic of experiencing burnout (Wilkerson, 2009). After speaking with participants about their varied difficulties, it was clear that participants were frequently surprised and frustrated by how overwhelmed they were feeling in their programs during these times of struggle. It was easy to relate to participants' experiences, and I made a conscious effort to avoid filling in the blanks or pauses to ensure my experiences remained separate as I continued to collect data.

Theme 2: Alone or Isolated

According to Jordan (2017), "Isolation interrupts growth. Isolation disempowers us and immobilizes us (p.231)." It is not, therefore, surprising that when asked about their experiences of burnout, most participants included instances of feeling alone or isolated. I was surprised by the complexity of these feelings. In some cases, participants expressed feeling alone due to being enrolled in an online learning environment where interactions

with faculty and peers were often limited. Participants also described feelings of loneliness due to being one of a limited number of people from a diverse background who were enrolled in their programs. Moreover, participants discussed feeling isolated from their friends and family members. In her interview, Dee Dee shared how she experienced loneliness in the following way:

> One of the hardest things about doing this online is that you really do feel like you're in a silo by yourself… you know. Last quarter I was able to reach out and share information and thoughts and stuff like that with other classmates but after that… it's really been hard to do that and to even maintain any friendships because you're just kind of sucked in a vacuum.

Dee Dee shared hopes that program developers would take into consideration new ways to help students feel connected, noting:

> If they would really be able to consider the face to face part of it… so that students are not… so that we don't feel alone… in the process. That's been one of the resonating comments that came out during the residency. With one of the other young ladies that I was able to speak with last quarter… you end up feeling like you're really in this by yourself. That makes it really hard 'cause you really do feel like you're in a silo and you're all alone, and I just have to bang this out. It's hard when you're working full time… when you are a parent, and then you come home, and you have this to do…Your time constraint is so tight.

Finally, Dee Dee expressed that although her grown son, who was living at home with her was supportive, she found herself unable to speak to him about the emotions she was

managing regarding school. She said, “I can’t really talk to him about any of the stuff that’s going on or what I might be experiencing uh with school because he’s just kinda that removed from it.”

Lina described her experience with isolation as a lack of understanding shown by others, noting:

> My husband, who has a Ph.D., [said] “I never remembered trying to work so hard as you are.” I’m like, “yeah, this is counseling. It’s very different from what you did.” and then he’s like “Yeah, I guess so.” He just doesn’t understand how much work we do when we prepare you know to be counselors professional counselors; he thought it’s just too much.”

Lina went on to discuss her experience as the only Asian student she knew of in her program stating:

> Yeah, again it’s the same thing. It just might be my sites. I don’t come across a lot of other people who share the same background as I do in terms of diversity. The same thing in my college too. I’m the only Asian in my college program. But then I do go to a very small college, so maybe that doesn’t come as a surprise. Even though I go to…. an online program, my internship site is at a much larger, closer university with a lot of international students up here. So you’d think that as an intern you’d bump into other people who are Asian counselors in training but not so, not the case. So that was a bit of a surprise, but as I go deeper I realize that yeah I guess minority students … minority background counselors they’re very few and far between.

Lastly, Lina professed to feel disconnected from her professional peers who also did not seem to comprehend her experiences as a student as they too were students, but on the social work track. “It made me appreciate [the] lack of understanding of what actually we [counselors] do…. It’s just something I’ve had to educate them about.”

Mable, the single, SAHM of two reported:

> I have family members like, for example, my mother… but… you know… because of my mother’s age sometimes… well, my mother doesn’t quite get that just because I’m physically not going to a class that day she thinks that I don’t have class. I say, mom… you know… I’m in graduate school so… I always am studying. Whether I have to physically be there or not. Or if I’m submitting something or working on something and I have to submit it by midnight Sunday, she [says] “I didn’t know you had class on Sunday” and I [say] “Mom, I don’t.” So, I’ll talk with her about things, but she just doesn’t quite get how graduate school is because she doesn’t understand the concept of going to school online. She doesn’t understand that. She [says], “you know… in my day you sat in class, and that’s what it was. What is this email? You know, you had a typewriter. You know, if you needed.” So I will talk to my mother, but it’s frustrating because she still doesn’t get it.

Mable elaborated on her feelings of isolation and being alone noting:

> I feel isolated within my family because… remember how I referenced my mother? Well, my sister understands but other family members don’t quite get it.

> And then also, even in school… I really feel… I wouldn't say isolated…I would say I feel alone.

Kathy, the single foster mother of 3, noted feeling isolated from her family although she recognized their attempt at supporting her:

> They don't know what it's like. They don't know what you have to go through to get this education done. I think their expectations are a little bit different, or they don't even know what to think or expect. I do feel that everybody was cheering on the sidelines and they want you to do this, do this, do this, but they don't understand what it takes. So maybe not everybody. Maybe a lack of support, but it was maybe a lack of support out of ignorance perhaps.

Tameka demurred on the direct topic of feeling isolated or alone noting that her husband was supportive of her and made additional efforts to help with their children, "My husband, of course, I live with so… it's going to be caution… to him it can come out as [though] I'm complaining…. He's just always here." However, when asked about changes online programs might make to improve students' experiences, she touted the idea of increasing the use of live video interactions and dispersing them more evenly throughout the program. Sandra also did not speak in depth about feeling alone or isolated from her family or peers, but she did express feeling as though there were times when certain instructors were inaccessible and the resulting frustration. Both Tameka and Sandra fell in the 31-40 age range and had two children in their homes. Although Tameka was the only one of the two who identified as married, Sandra shared that she had a very close knit inner circle of friends.

Theme 3: Bottoming Out

No matter the participant, their experiences of burnout often culminated in feeling as though they were not going to make it, sinking, or "bottoming out." Each participant experienced it at different phases of their learning process, but ultimately the feeling of not being able to "make it to the end" was what connected each description they provided. For example, Lina reported:

> I feel like my college, because of the CACREP thing, it actually has given me an edge over a lot of other people who have not gone through CACREP, so I like that. But sometimes when you're in the midst of it, it can really feel like… If you don't know how to handle yourself, you could very well sink very quickly.

Tameka spoke about her experiences of bottoming out, saying, "I just knew I wasn't going to graduate. She elaborated further stating:

> There were times when I was like you know what? I want to take a break. I need time off. I will come back. I'll do this at a later time. I can't. I can't do it right now. So, I did feel like it was… you know… 'cause it was a lot, and I just felt like because I was pregnant and then so much work that had to be done and then so many hours you had to log so many hours...

Dee Dee also discussed her own emotional upheavals with bottoming out, describing her coursework as "grueling" and noting the fact that there were "several times" when she thought about quitting and felt ready "to throw in the towel." She shared that she often found herself questioning why she was doing it all. Managing the many aspects of her life

simultaneously with her degree brought her to a place of feeling "overwhelmed" on more than one occasion:

> It's a lot to juggle and a lot to manage and to maintain a household and… and my little dog who's also attention seeking as he looks at me… it's been a lot, and there have been a lot of times where it's been overwhelming. Like… I feel myself bottoming out. School literally at that point was so consuming I knew I needed to do something because I knew I wasn't going to make it. I wasn't going to make it to the end.

Bottoming out for Sandra was a feeling of stagnation, an inability to move on her part while being completely outside of her control. When sharing about the difficulties she faced due to being required to redo a portion of her practicum and not knowing how she would get it done, she stated, "Uh you know I feel very, very stuck and almost out of options. I know I'm going to figure it out, but it feels very… uh… I feel very stuck."

Kathy also bottomed out while trying to figure out how to get her clinical hours completed, but having no luck. When asked about that time, Kathy stated, "That was almost the end of me." She went on to note:

> It wasn't working. Nothing was working. I was very despondent. Here I was, I started work, the school semester had started, and I mean I was literally… you know… 8… 16…18 weeks from finishing my degree and having no idea how it was going to happen.

Mable's experience of bottoming out occurred when a number of personal health and family concerns collided:

> I was hospitalized unexpectedly and then shortly thereafter, my mother. Another piece to me with my identity is I also… my mother does not live with me, but I'm very much my mother's caregiver. So, I'm a single mom, I'm a full-time graduate student, and I have a child with profound special needs who is nonverbal, who cannot walk… x, y, and z. Just global and my mother is getting up in age, but I also am very much responsible for her livelihood. So, within the same month of November, I was hospitalized unexpectedly. Then I'm coming back. I'm on the mend and then my mother, she is hospitalized. So I'm just trying to make it through the semester. I said you know…I'm killing myself trying to balance home and my responsibility.

Although bottoming out occurred at varied stages for each participant, I would be remiss if I ignored the fact that most interviewees experienced their feelings of hitting bottom when attempting to complete their clinical hours and internship experiences. Of all of the personal and academic concerns participants shared, clinical hours and the securing of internship sites seemed to be the most prolific and the most difficult for participants to navigate. In addition participants shared a desire for programs to be more transparent in this area by providing more detailed and up to date guidance, if not actual assistance with placements.

Theme 4: Doing what needs to be done

Anaya (2011) affirmed women of color in higher education face a number of challenges, such as being misunderstood, overused, and underappreciated. Conway-Jones (2006) also discussed that many of the challenges were directly related to women of color

being viewed as "compassionate care-givers, counselors, and symbols (p. 23)." This is also compounded by the societal ideas of what being a "good student" and "good mother" means and how each of the MoCs apply those meanings to themselves (Anaya, 2011; Schultheiss, 2009). Each of the mothers I interviewed described being raised or taught in some way to be hardworking, selfless, and to do whatever needs to be done. Mable described being asked on multiple occasions how she managed to do the things she did:

> They always say, 'how do you do it?' And I'm always looking at them like 'I have no choice!' I mean that is the thing that just blows me away because they're like 'I don't see how you…' I'm like 'what do you mean?' I mean…. I'm going to take care of my children. Just because I'm a single mom that doesn't mean that my children are supposed to… [that] their experience is supposed to be different. Okay, and I'm going to school. I mean what? I mean, there is no option. There is no option.

Although Mable was confounded by her peers' surprise at all that she does, it did not diminish her resolve or prevent her from doing the things she felt needed to be done in order for her family to thrive, while she continued to meet her academic goals. She went on to share:

> I moved my mom close to me in senior apartments, and I look after my mom. People who have an option don't understand, and I'm like I have no option here. I'm gonna take care of my mama 'cause my mama took care of me okay…when I couldn't take care of myself. And my children are gonna be fine, and they're gonna be fed. I mean, I'm doing what I have to do.

Lina spoke about how her background and familial examples led to her ability to do what needs to be done stating:

> I think one of the common traits that is on my mom's side was that the women were very hard working. Like we had this work ethic although I can see now…ultimately [in] whatever they'd do. [Whether] they were homemakers or they had jobs, or whatever one thing is we had to stay the course and kind of just knuckle down. And like get on with it. So providing for family as well as being our best, you know, at whatever we did is a very important job and effected their lives. Maybe subconsciously I do fall into that pattern. I see I'm just following that group that already. Maybe it's a trait, maybe. We'll just say that it's a trait in my family.

Lina noted that the women in her family strive for excellence in whatever they do and that she, too, found herself exhibiting this work ethic both at school and at home. Similarly, Sandra spoke directly about the "big push" she felt from her family early on to be able to maximize every opportunity she was presented. She went on to share more, noting that even when obstacles arose, she not only faced those obstacles, she pushed through even further:

> I got pregnant early, you know. Even though it may be early, it was still…. I still had these expectations for myself that I would still take advantage of everything. So it continued to motivate me, and it continued to help me work past challenges and obstacles.

Sandra went on to describe her personal resilience and ability to do what needed to be done after experiencing a notable medical setback and the resulting academic upheaval:

> I had a seizure that kind of almost wiped out some of my short term memory. After overcoming that, I was able to get everything turned in and the school, unfortunately, despite me having an A in the class and having gotten a perfect score on all the assignments, except for one, decided toward the end that they were going to change that to a failing grade and force me to repeat the course. So that is very very frustrating and its currently frustrating because not only did I have to take time away from my family, but then also trying to get all the work done under less than ideal circumstances just to be told: "okay now you have to do it again."

Sandra admitted that "It's a challenge," but attributed her lack of stagnation in the face of this monumental setback to "grinding forth," balancing "pros and cons" daily and actively psyching herself up.

Kathy shared her experience with doing what needed to be done when it came to drumming up clients to complete her clinical hours. She shared the fact that her clinical site director was supportive, but was also concerned:

> She was very doubtful that I would be able to get the hours I needed with them, but I went on ahead, and I just said 'I didn't care what I needed to do.' I didn't care if I needed to take money out of my pocket to buy treats. I didn't know. I mean, I just was at my wit's end 'cause all I wanted to do was finish school.

Tameka spoke about doing what needed to be done in terms of self-care from a view point of self- awareness, and self-determination. She suggested, to some extent, we have the ability to choose how to proceed in life, noting:

> I mean 'cause when you think about it… it still all falls down on that person and how we feel like we need to take care of ourselves. I feel like then I was pregnant… so was that the best time for me to be in school? So, that's something I could have thought about. Maybe I could have better planned it. So I feel like it still just falls back on me.

Dee Dee illustrated her ability to do what needed to be done when she spoke about her struggle in a, particularly difficult class. She shared her experience noting:

> In the program evaluation class, I could not grasp it. I don't know if it's because I felt like everything was abstract. The information wasn't clear. I couldn't get it, and I was just done. My grade was a C, and no matter what me and the professor talked about, I thought I got it, but when I went back, and I did the assignments apparently I didn't get it…. I think that's the only time I felt that frustrated through this whole learning process. I was up 'til 4 o'clock in the morning doing the final project and just really kind of at my end. You get to that point when you know… I'm in tears, and you're like 'I can't do it' and I really don't even care at this point. But I really did care because I really needed that grade to come up and that was all I could see in front of me. The professor, he was the one that was really there and at the end of it I had actually done enough to bring the grade up so that I did pass.

In spite of her medical concerns and potential issues with comprehending the material, Dee Dee succeeded in pushing through in order to meet her goals. This demonstration of her ability to do what needed to be done is a glaring example of the grit and determination that most MoCs exhibit at one point or another when faced with personal or in this case academic challenges. In Dee Dee's experience, she noted being able to rely on a supportive, growth-fostering relationship with one of her professors; however, this is not always the case. Most of the participants shared the desire to have more support that understood their academic needs and experiences.

Theme 5: Pressure to perform

Graduate student MoCs feel pressure to perform both academically and in their roles as moms (Anaya, 2011). In some cases, the pressure mothers felt was due to antiquated societal standards or comparisons, but in other instances, the pressure came from professors, family members, or oneself. Some participants also described their experiences of this pressure in terms of needing to set an example as a woman of color (Zeligman et al., 2015). Mable described feeling more of an internal than external pressure to perform asserting, "I feel that as women of color… well, in this case, I'm going to say, African-American women, I would say that I think we place pressure on ourselves." She went on to elaborate on where this internal pressure was rooted, stating, "I need to finish because I would like to be an example for my community. I want to help remove some of this stigma, and also all of these labels and misdiagnoses. I'm trying to do something about that." Along the same lines, Dee Dee expressed feeling internal

pressure to be a role model for other women at the psycho-social rehabilitation program where she worked.

> Being an African-American woman…. Currently, I'm a program coordinator for a psycho-social rehabilitation program for mentally ill individuals. And my staff is predominantly ethnic. We have African-American, we have Latina, and we have maybe two Caucasian staff, but primarily African-American and Latina. And the population pretty much fits that mold as well. My staff knows that I'm in school and it kind of sets the precedence for them as well. If you want to get to this level, you need to have the additional education.

Dee Dee also expounded on feeling external pressure to be a role model noting her being a role model "mattered" and was important for the clients in her community to see:

> It does matter, and it matters to the clients when they know that you're in the position that you're in and your skin looks like my skin. You know…. some people would say that to the client it doesn't matter, but when I talk to a lot of the ethnic clients, it really does matter. Not that you treat anybody differently; as you embrace their whole cultural experience as well, but it does make a difference. Actually, let me rephrase that… I think it makes a difference because there's a general understanding of the culture and there's [an] understanding of the connotations in the language that is used, and you know… it makes a difference. So, I'm happy to be the role model that way.

As MoCs in higher education, participants recognized their scarcity and often had to accept being "token" or one of few representations of their ethnicity in their academic

programs and jobs (Zeligman et al., 2015). This seemed to present its own level of added pressure, although as noted, participants still took pride in being able to be the difference they want to see happening in academia and the counseling profession overall.

Aside from feeling the added pressure of being MoCs, participants reported feeling pressured to perform by the way their programs were set up. Lina noted:

> I think they cram too much in. I really seriously think they really try to pack everything in too much. I know that they do tell us 'oh yeah you can do it in how many semesters you want, take as long as you want'… but the reality is most of us who are on this program we have already decided … this is it.

Though Lina noted the external pressure she felt from being in a rigorous academic program; she also shared some of the internal pressure when looking at personal time constraints and expectations for completion:

> We have to get through in this number of semesters. All of us have financial burdens. We want to get on to the 'start working,' and you know start paying off loans or whatever. So, I think we're all pressured, but at the same time, you know our program is like classes are 8 weeks. It's very intense to do the quality of work that they demand.

Tameka also felt pressure to perform due to the workload and the intensity of her program noting:

> I felt most of the pressure, and everything came from just….I don't know if it was… I mean it could have been because it's online.… I feel like it was more accelerated. More fast paced. Versus going to a campus….but then again, that can

> be time consuming as well. So I just felt like it was a lot. It was a lot. You had to pretty much be able to manage your time.

Sandra described herself as being goal oriented and coming from an immigrant family. There were added pressures she described as a "big push" toward utilizing opportunities. She spoke about pressure from her family, stating:

> Let's see. My family are actually… my kids are first generation American. So, you know when we moved to the States, I guess we were all kind of expected to just to take advantage of all opportunities afforded to us.

Dee Dee also experienced pressure to perform coming from the amount of work expected from her programs:

> I always feel like I'm crunching, even though we have the seven days. I always feel like I'm crunching the reading. I'm crunching the discussion. Then I have to go back and respond to the discussions, and there's a couple times where I literally thought I responded to the discussions, but I didn't because there's so much other stuff that I have to do.

Kathy talked about the internal pressure she had been placing on herself for years, noting:

> I just had a very sobering moment to realize that my life [sigh] for the last twenty-something years has been a back to back to back to back to back. I have been going nonstop. As a single parent, 'cause when I gave birth to my daughter when I was 22, I only had a high school diploma. And so I'm talking about I started out in [the] department of corrections as a correctional officer [for] 2 or 3 years. [I] was miserable doing that. [I] got out of that. [I] started working on a AA degree.

> [I] finished a AA degree in one December and matriculated the very next month to start my bachelor's in criminal justice. [I] finished my bachelor's in criminal justice. I never even celebrated that accomplishment.

Kathy placed internal pressure on herself to systematically power through and achieve these feats, but she did not stop there, nor did she take time to celebrate any of her many accomplishments.

> One year later I was in school for that first master's I was telling you about. Finished that master's and went into teaching having no idea…. what teaching would take out of me.... But I went into teaching because I felt like I had not been present enough as a mom.

Kathy beat herself up for not living up to the "good mom" and "good student" identities she assumed based on societal standards and expectations. These external pressures ultimately translated into internal pressure which she only recently has begun to try to eliminate. Whether internal or external, MoCs feel pressure to perform and perform well.

Theme 6: Learning for life

The process of completing a master's provides opportunities for both personal and professional education. Four of the six participants made mention of things they learned that were profound in some way or going to "stick with them." Dee Dee described the idea behind learning for life best stating, "I think what you learn about yourself… especially in the mental health counseling program, is immeasurable." In addition to the tangible things participants learned in the various courses throughout their programs,

there were also life lessons and self-discoveries that would not have occurred were they not faced with the challenges their programs created. Dee Dee went on to note:

> It's not even about the degree. It's more so what you learn about yourself and who you are and what you stand for and what you believe in and what you're taking forward with you once you leave this educational arena. It'll stay [with] you for the rest of your life, and you can use that to pay every grace that you've experienced forward through healing and understanding.

Somewhat different than the lasting learning Dee Dee described, Lina shared her experience of the learning life lessons noting that she has and will continue to benefit from her program:

> I feel like it has been such a wonderful… you know… even though painful learning process. I feel like there are other hidden benefits that have come my way having gone through this program.

Lina went on to elaborate on the unexpected benefits of her program noting:

> It has had a good impact on my family. I'll tell you why. On the individual level 'cause even as I trained to be a counselor in training, you know the training also affects us personally in our lives…. feel like this [program] increased my own sense of understanding and insight about my own problems and my own family issues. Not that I want to counsel them, but just being aware and catching myself [saying] "Oh! Right! I should stop doing that." I feel like you should practice what you preach.

Being able to reach her goals and model for her children, the motivation required to seek a degree online seemed to be more than enough for Sandra. She shared that her take away from the overall learning process was:

> Both gratifying and challenging at times. You know I'm very goal oriented so sometimes it's nice to have achievable goals or something to work toward. Having kids kind of early also gave me the emphasis or additional motivation to succeed and to pursue some of these goals.

Tameka viewed the professional training and development aspects of her learning as integral and seemed excited to apply specific things she learned during her experiences in practice. Overall she described her program and training stating:

> I mean, it was beneficial. Because of that [training], now I still don't do certain things…. I remember one thing I was taught at residency….when you are working with a client it's not about you.… I may say, "okay, well, I've experienced that as well." But I'm not going to sit there and…. take over and make it about me. It's not about me. I've seen a therapist and she talked about herself, and I was sitting there like my professor said not to do this…. So I've learned stuff [in the program] and its sticking with me, and I feel like I'm good.

Nancy and Sandra did not specifically note feeling as though their programs helped them learn profound or lasting life-lessons. However, they both recognized the professional development inherent in their programs and appreciated it. Overall, participants shared feeling as though the process of graduate learning helped them grow as individuals and professionals.

Theme 7: Self-care: Yeah, right!

When talking to participants, it became exceedingly clear that the concept of self-care was not something to which these women truly ascribed. Self-care has been found to be vital for helping professionals, and in counselor education, it is understood that students in training need to develop sound self-care practices (Nelson et al., 2018). Unfortunately, for the women in this study, it seemed as though the idea of self-care was almost in direct opposition to many of the facets they shared about themselves and their cultures. Holm et al. (2015) decried the feelings of guilt graduate student moms reported when trying to maintain their responsibilities as students as well as meeting the expectation of being *good mothers*. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that most of the mothers were definitely struggling with similar guilt. In Mable's case, she noted feeling guilty when enjoying a moment of free time to herself:

> You know it's that guilt sometimes that you have in graduate school where if you're just sitting… They always talk about self-care, but if you're just sitting, and you just have like a little time to yourself, you feel like "I really should be doing…" "I really could study…" "I really could do x, y, and z."

Lina described her experience attempting to meet academic and familial demands while attempting to utilize a self-care plan. Although she did not use the term guilt, her self-deprecation was apparent:

> So yeah. In theory, it's good. Yeah, we know what we're supposed to do. But just how demanding the courses [are]….it's not feasible, I don't think. Especially if, a lot of us already have so much on our plate, so there's really no time for that. This

> is a common complaint among all my classmates too. We were just talking about it that day, and we were told to write up all these treatment plans for ourselves and our self-care. [Those] treatment plan…it was so laughable. The next semester we were asked to look at it again, and we were like nope didn't do that…nope didn't do that… [either].

Despite Lina understanding the concept of self-care that was taught and even outlining a self-care plan for herself, she found the idea of implementing it laughable based on the amount of work required by her program and everyday life. She stated:

> There's so much… you know. I know its high standards as well, but you know to stay on your toes like that it takes a lot of work…. You have to put in the work, so there is really no time. [Not] a lot of time left for your own self-care.

Similarly, Tameka noted that she too struggled with utilizing the learned concept of self-care with any regularity and cited her family as part of the reason why:

> I wasn't [using self-care] at all. Then and now. I'm still not doing it. I try, but it's so hard when you have a family, and especially I think with this profession itself… I feel like my mind is so much on I'm gonna help this person; I'm gonna do this; I'm gonna do that…. But what about me… you know? So I feel like "Yeah." I went to get my nails done here and there or…. I did go to the mall and just kind of hang out with my daughter so… I mean I would say that would be self-care for the most part, but as far as a lot I didn't have time. I didn't have time.

Conversely, Dee Dee shared that she made concerted efforts to do things she enjoys, like spending time with her dog, taking dance classes, and praise dancing at her church. Praise

dancing is a form of dance and movement that is an expression of religious worship. In spite of making these efforts, Dee Dee still felt the need to limit her activities:

> So anything I do in terms of self-care I have to do it around how much time can I actually sacrifice so that I don't end up losing that time toward schoolwork. I realized I think around term three, that I needed to keep up with the things that I do for self-care.

In spite of the efforts she made, Dee Dee still laughed at the idea of regular self-care for people who are in helping professions noting:

> You probably already know… People in this field, in social work and human services and mental health and all that we're natural caretakers and we, are amazingly wonderful at taking care of everybody else and we are horrific at taking care of ourselves.

Kathy recognized the lack of self-care in her life and described her plans to do better moving forward:

> It came to the beginning of the year, and like I said, it was not a new year's resolution thing. It was just a thing. I have not been doing good with self-care. And so, I went on my computer [and] for every month, April all the way through December, I have given the agency one weekend a month that I want respite. And it doesn't matter if I'm sitting in house the whole weekend…. I did some retail therapy, but I was basically home…and I'm going to do that every single month.

In addition to scheduling time off, Kathy took her plans for self-care further noting some of the hobbies she missed doing and her goal to begin doing them again:

> I love, love, love to read… I'm definitely taking an extended break [from fostering]. I honestly enjoy what I do. I love those kids, but I need to decompress, and I have not been decompressing or doing that, so I'm gonna do things. My daughter [and] her husband just stationed in [a new city]. I've never been, so I can't wait to go up there. My granddaughter is 18 months old, and I love spending time with her. Yeah… so those are the kinds of things that I want to spend more time doing. Yeah. So, I have a plan for sure.

Lastly, of all the participants Sandra was the only one who reported implementing self-care strategies periodically throughout each day, and even she noted feeling as though she would like to do more. She shared:

> I find that I don't have large sums of time, but I have a little…well, what do you call this? I guess you call it a little hour glass, but instead of an hour it's 5 minutes. And so, I bought it kind of just to remind myself throughout the day just to take 5 minutes for myself whether it's just to meditate, take a deep breath, sit in silence or do something that's non-work-related.

Most of Sandra's self-care strategies fell in line with many of the strategies that are currently taught in courses. Though this did not hold true for most of the participants, I interviewed, Sandra went on to share additional self-care strategies she relies on as well as the fact that in spite of her efforts, she still would like to do more things that bring her joy:

> I try to make sure that I set some time to the side for things that I enjoy doing, such as reading [and] taking walks. It's not as much [time] as I would like to do…

> but I know that I try to do it when I think about it. Or sometimes it's just that 10 or 15 minute phone call with somebody that'll listen. [Sighs] Or somebody that you can vent to. That sometimes brings me joy or love.

Self-care, as it is currently taught in most academic programs, was not a concept that truly resonated with most of the participants in this study. Instead, participants reported feeling guilty when they engaged in "self-care" strategies solely for themselves.

Theme 8: Faith and God's grace

Four out of the six women that I interviewed expressed some level of reliance on their personal faith structure or system of beliefs as one of the primary reasons they made it to where they were. This was not surprising, as many women of color rely on spirituality and religious practices as systems of support (Zeligman et al., 2015). The ideas of praying, believing in one's calling to this field, and trusting in a higher power were a large portion of what these participants credited as how they managed or overcame the hardships and obstacles they faced. Mable spoke of a time when she felt defeated, stating, "Last fall was just a mess for me… but I finished by the grace of God." Sandra noted feeling as though her faith kept her "somewhat grounded."

Kathy spoke of her faith being the reason she was able to be kind to herself stating, "That's why I'm able to talk to you about accepting the love of God in my life the way I really needed to and not being rigorous and rigid on myself." She went on to express how her shared faith helps her connect with her support system, noting:

> I reach out to her, [her best friend], and the reason I reach out to her is because she is so positive. She's so encouraging. She is a Christian person. Just like I am.

> However, she does not give me the response my mom and my sisters give me as Christians. They tell me to pray about it. Boom. That's it. And so, yes, prayer is powerful. I don't deny that, but I feel like if I'm a Christian and you're a Christian, you already know that I know that. I feel brushed off when somebody tells me that when maybe what I need to do is just get this off my chest, take a deep breath, and move on.

Kathy expounded on her connection with her best friend, noting the way her friend walked in their shared faith made a huge difference in how she received her support:

> But she's just so positive. She is encouraging, and she always lets me know she's praying for me. She just doesn't tell me to pray for myself. She tells me, "I'm praying for you. Me and my husband are praying for you." So, it's just comforting, but that would be the main reason why I reach out to her…. She listens, and there's no condemnation or judgement or telling me that I lack faith and that I need to read my Word more.

Lastly, Dee Dee described needing the spiritual component *praise dancing* gave her, which in turn helped her have the strength to push through in her program:

> I praise dance with my church and I take dance classes on the weekend and those were things I was actually considering giving up because they can be anywhere from two to three hours and I was so bombarded with school work. I had to make myself come back to my senses. I can't afford to walk away from these things 'cause these are things that I love, and they're the things that actually help me and feed me spiritually.

The majority of the MoCs I interviewed noted the importance their individual systems of belief had on their experiences as graduate students as well as during their times managing burnout. Some participants were more open than others about how their faith and belief systems impacted their resilience as well as their overall ability to maneuver graduate education online successfully. This contrasted with the others who were more reserved in their discussions of faith. This reservation may have been due to the deeply personal nature spirituality holds for many people.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I presented a review of the research setting, participants' demographics, and profiles, as well as other details of the data collection and analysis process. An explanation of trustworthiness followed prior to the presentation of the study findings. In this study, I attempted to understand the experiences and management of burnout by MoCs in CACREP-accredited CMHC programs online. I sought to do this by asking two primary research questions "How do women of color who are mothers completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in a CACREP-accredited online learning environment describe their experiences of burnout?" and "How do women of color who are mothers manage burnout while completing a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) in an online CACREP-accredited learning environment?"

The following themes emerged from the descriptions the six participants provided: (a) The struggle is real (b) Alone/Isolation (c) Bottoming out (d) Doing what needs to be done (e) Pressure to perform (f) Learning for life (g) Self-care: Yeah, right!

(h) Faith and God's grace. These emergent themes represented the commonalities in the experiences of burnout detailed by these MoCs while completing their master's degrees online. The interviews revealed that for most of the participants self-care was not a concept employed with any regularity, if at all, and that there were any number of pressures and struggles these women faced from their various roles pretty much at all times. In addition I found that although online learning presented some challenges, most of the moms had positive experiences in their programs. Many MoCs in online CACREP-accredited CMHC programs rely on faith and belief structures, but still, need to find ways to implement self-care practices both regularly and without feelings of guilt.

In Chapter 5, I will present the interpretation of the results, limitations of the study, and my recommendations. I also will provide my personal reflections as well as suggestions for future research on the topic. I will then discuss the implications for social change. Lastly, I will present my conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to understand the experiences and management of burnout by MoCs in CACREP-accredited CMHC programs online. I used a qualitative, GT study to explore, analyze, and interpret the descriptions participants provided of their experiences while completing their degrees online. In this chapter, I present my interpretation of the study findings using RCT. I then discuss the limitations of the study, as well as my recommendations and reflections. Finally, I present potential implications for social change and the study conclusion.

The theoretical framework for this study was Baker Miller's RCT. RCT was developed as a means of understanding the specific experiences of women (Jordan, 2008). RCT theorists adhere to the idea that in order to truly understand women's experiences, those experiences must be processed through the lens of human interaction. Human interactions or relationships are what give experiences meaning (Jordan, 2008; Lenz, 2014). I used RCT as the lens through which I viewed participants' experiences because this study was specific to women and took into consideration participants' cultures and relationships. In other words, every experience the MoC who participated in this study described was given meaning based on their interactions (or lack thereof) with others in some way (relationships), in addition to their inherent individual cultural perspectives.

The emergent theory I was able to generate from the data was a Relational Cultural Experience of Burnout. This theory of burnout was based on the paradox of

Aloneness versus *Support* participants described. Although each participant described an individual experience, viewing their collective experiences led to the development of multiple themes across all participant data. The themes derived from the descriptions participants provided were (a) the struggle is real (b) alone/isolation (c) bottoming out (d) doing what needs to be done (e) pressure to perform (f) learning for life (g) self-care: yeah, right!, and (h) faith and God's grace. These emergent themes represented the commonalities in the experiences of burnout detailed by MoCs during the process of completing their master's degrees in CMHC online. Throughout each theme, participants' feelings of *aloneness* or *support* led to disconnection or connection which manifested in stagnation, an inability to thrive or grow. *Aloneness* was in direct opposition to the desire to feel *supported* that MoCs expressed. When *support* was readily available and used, connection occurred, which lead to growth. MoCs struggled with achieving the goals they set when there was a lack of connectivity.

Interpretation of the Findings

For this study, I interviewed participants to get detailed descriptions of their experiences of burnout as MoCs completing their master's of CMHC in online CACREP-accredited programs. In addition, throughout the interviews, participants provided accounts of how they managed their experiences of burnout. Each participant discussed their experiences, the challenges they faced, as well as how they made it through those challenges. Ultimately, these descriptions led to the emergence of eight themes (a) the struggle is real (b) alone/isolation (c) bottoming out (d) doing what needs to be done (e)

pressure to perform (f) learning for life (g) self-care: yeah, right!, and (h) faith and god's grace.

Theme 1: "The struggle is real."

Across the board, participants noted that completing a master's in CMHC online was a struggle. This struggle was one that they all embarked upon intentionally and with the realistic expectation of putting in hard work. Lynch (2008) found that the configuration of academia as we currently know it does not meet the needs of graduate student mothers. Similarly, the participants in this study noted the intersection where school met work and/or home life was often more difficult than they imagined. This was in part due to the lack of flexibility in their programs as well as the expectations placed on graduate student parents. Anaya (2011) decried the lack of accommodations and consideration universities provide for the multiple identities of women, especially MoCs, often have. For example, few brick and mortar universities offer childcare options despite growing numbers of student parents (Eckerson et al., 2016). It appears online programs similarly overlook the need to make accommodations for nontraditional students. Accommodations such as student advisors and mentors willing and able to review student commitments and goals that include family and/or work would give graduate student parents, specifically, MoCs a foundation of support on which to build their academic careers. Unfortunately, the online programs within the scope of this study did not offer much if anything in support of the MoCs interviewed. This absence of support is more pronounced when the graduate students under scrutiny are MoCs and completing their degrees online.

Each MoC that participated in the interviews noted financial, familial, or employment stressors at times exacerbated their already formidable school struggles. In some cases, participants found themselves having to take terms off or putting school on hold to be able to facilitate their day-to-day lives. Single mother of two, Mable, noted feeling as though she had no other options than to quit her program of study. Although her school advisors sympathized with her when she had difficulty trying to attend residency, there was no system of exceptions or alternatives in place at her school that would have allowed her to be able to continue school at that time and be able to meet her son's special needs requirements. In Mable's situation, there was not a way for her to complete her program of study without attending residency, which required her to spend a week away from her children. As the sole caregiver to her children, this was not an option. However, if there was a way to collaborate with a local institute or clinical practice, similar to an internship or practicum, she would have been able to meet her face-to-face training requirement in smaller, more palatable periods of time. As nontraditional students continue to pursue higher education online, creativity in programing, flexibility, and having family specific policies in place to assist student parents may prove essential.

Theme 2: Alone/Isolation

Throughout the interviews, participants shared their experiences of feeling alone or isolated. Jordan (2017) stated, "Isolation interrupts growth. Isolation disempowers us and immobilizes us" (p. 231). Conversely, connection helps women grow and reach their full potential (Jordan, 2008; 2017). This holds true for MoCs no matter the role they

fill— student or caregiver. Most participants' feelings of being alone or isolated seemed to relate to having multiple identities. For example, Lina noted feeling alone in terms of being the only person of Asian ancestry that she was aware of both in her school program as well as at her internship sites. Lina expressed surprise at being the only person of Asian ancestry in both places because although she attended a small online program, her internship led to her interacting with peers at a large local university with international student enrollment. Lina also expected that there would be some change in her experience of program demography because of living in a metropolitan area, but this was not the case.

Not sharing her racial identity with peers left Lina to seek other ways of connecting. Lina talked about connecting with peers on a professional level by focusing on their shared passion for counseling. In addition, she noted being older than most of the other interns seemed to give her an added advantage:

> I'm the oldest intern in my place, and I'm one of the older students of my program too. I think age helps 'cause we're more comfortable in our skin. Maybe because of life experience … so we're like 'ehh its okay' you know. I'm like 'yeah, I'm different, so what?'

Lina felt that her peers seemed to feed off of her energy and comfort level. She noted that because she was already confident and comfortable with herself, she was able to begin building relationships with younger peers who were initially awkward and withdrawn. Lina's ability to overcome the isolation inherent in being "other" racially, and in terms of age speaks to the resiliency MoCs must often demonstrate.

Unfortunately, other participants also experienced feelings of isolation in more than one of their identities at a time. Dee Dee reported feeling isolated from her family because of being unable to talk to them about her online learning process as well as feeling isolated from her peers at school because they were online. Existing literature supports Dee Dee's feelings of isolation from her online peers (Bichsel, 2013; Venter, 2003), as well as her desire to find balance in order, thrive in her multiple roles (Anaya, 2011; Holm et al., 2015). Kibelloh and Bao (2014) asserted that balancing roles or identities is one of the biggest challenges that graduate student MoCs face. Participants in this study affirmed this as well.

Participants frequently spoke of feeling as though peers or family members "didn't get" what they were going through and even when they had people in their support systems to whom they vented; they did not feel understood. This point was made salient when at the end of our interview, upon receiving my thanks, Dee Dee responded by stating, "This was actually kind of therapeutic for me. Cause I mean … You know … who am I talking to about this?" Dee Dee's seemingly offhand remark stood out to me as a prime example of what most of these mothers expressed overall, that even when they had people to talk to or a clearly defined system of support, there remained a disconnect. The absence of connection left most of the moms I spoke with feeling bereft and trying to figure out how to manage on their own.

The Paradox of Isolation. Although each participant noted feeling isolated or alone a great majority of the time, three participants shared having brief periods of feeling highly connected. These times of hyperconnection were during residency, brief

periods of time when online students are required to meet face to face. Participants described forging connections with peers and professors quickly during this intense time designed to teach and test clinical skills. This paradox of online students finding and establishing these connections swiftly as opposed to developing slowly over time was unexpected and intriguing. In one instance, a participant touted the lasting friendship and contacts she was only able to forge because of her time at residency, while Dee Dee described the connections she made during residency as being fleeting at best and ending shortly thereafter. Lina described her experience sharing:

> Even though we're separated and only meet once a year for residency, it's like the speed at which we kinda get to know our classmates has been very quick ….We are forced to work together … then we have this very intense one week we spend together all from morning to night.

The remaining participants did not specifically note establishing deep connections or the lack thereof; however, all reported enjoying aspects of the residency experience for one reason or another. Sandra noted the required time away from home, and her caregiving responsibilities felt like a source of respite for her, as a working parent. Tameka enjoyed the opportunity to participate in in-person skills training and practice with professors and peers sharing:

> It was great, actually. I ended up going to Dallas, and it was great. It was a great experience. The one on one… you know… just the kinda sitting in front of people and being able….to practice your skills even though we didn't have any. Just to

> put it out… It was good. I mean, it was different, but it was great. I learned a lot from it.

Ultimately, participants noted more periods of feeling isolated from peers and/or family more than they felt connected and supported. In order for MoCs to thrive in such learning environments, it is imperative that programs find more frequent and accessible ways for students to build networks of support and nurture relationships (Jordan, 2017). One suggestion a participant made was the use of video meetings on occasion in each class. Though this is only one possible suggestion, it helps expound upon ways program developers might enhance the online experience for this population.

Theme 3: Bottoming out

Hitting the bottom of something is never the description used to express an accomplishment. Similarly, when participants began speaking of their experiences of burnout, this idea of "bottoming out" or hitting a low point in their lives emerged. Clark et al. (2009) noted graduate students might experience burnout as issues that manifest physically and psychologically during their programs. Although each participant's "bottom" was unique unto themselves, each participant shared experiences that they deemed their lowest points both personally and academically. In some cases, bottoming out was described as a feeling of "sinking" or "drowning." The dread and inevitability they felt as they spoke about these moments were palpable. The descriptions participants provided aligned with the physical and psychological depletion that is characteristic of emotional exhaustion (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Although current literature supports the idea of burnout in graduate students being a concern (Cieslak, 2016; Clark et al., 2009; Craig & Sprang, 2010; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016), these findings provided examples of the experiences of burnout as reported by graduate student MoCs. As participants shared their experiences, they also shared their suggestions for additional training and support they would like to see programs offer. As it stood, most participants noted being unaware of or unable to access services to help them during their lowest points and were presumably in more need than at any other time in their academic programs. Presumably, if one has reached the bottom, having a system in place to help find the way out would be ideal.

The Conundrum of Clinical Hours. In discussing the idea of "bottoming out" with participants, it became clear that the process of finding placements and the completion of clinical hours was a particularly troublesome low point they each faced. This challenge was clear enough to serve as a sub-theme on its own. Despite various personal concerns or issues plaguing participants at different times and academic stages, every mother I spoke with decried some aspect of their practicum and internship experience or placement process. Issues ranged from having a hard time finding potential placements, to having to extend the time allotted for the completion of hours, to even being required to redo the entire experience altogether. Each participant noted the need for a better, more clearly defined process, as well as a solid system of support for this aspect of online programs.

Theme 4: Doing what needs to be done

Women of color are often taught and expected to be hard working, to do what needs to be done, and to put others ahead of themselves (Anaya, 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). Anaya (2011) even found that people viewed women of color in academia as "compassionate caregivers" and that women of color were frequently sought out as "go-to" individuals. This "go-to" status at times leads to the overuse and in some cases, exploitation of faculty of color (Anaya, 2011). It seems that a similar phenomenon may be at work within this population.

Having been socialized early on to put others needs first and to "push through" exhaustion, MoCs are often "go-to" members of their families and social groups (Anaya, 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). This is also compounded by the simple fact of being a mom. Schultheiss (2009) decried the idea that mothering and other domestic work continues to be overlooked and undervalued but is no less necessary to the running of a household. In addition, this work continues to fall primarily on mothers regardless of whether they work outside of the home (Holm et al., 2015; Schultheiss, 2009; Stinchfield & Trepal, 2010). Participants did not report having issues caring for their families, but they did share concerns about attempting to meet all the expectations and requirements their multiple roles and identities engendered.

From an RCT perspective, it is easy to see that these graduate student MoCs identified themselves in terms of how they took care of those around them as well as how well they met expectations set by themselves, their families, or society (Anaya, 2011). Sandra described herself as having "grit" for her ability to be strong, withstand, and push through, whereas Lina shared that she would "stay the course" and "knuckle down… and

get on with it." For graduate student MoCs, sacrifice feels necessary in order to do all the things that need to be done. Unfortunately, this sacrifice is often at their physical and mental expense.

Theme 5: Pressure to perform

Participants described having feelings of guilt, stress, and anxiety for not being able to "find balance" or "do it all." Hughes and Kleist (2005) emphasized the idea that burnout in graduate counseling students was commonly characterized by personal pressure combined with existing rigorous academic pursuits. Zeligman et al. (2015) affirmed MoCs in higher education often over-compensated or felt the need to prove themselves. Ultimately these feelings came together as the pressure to perform participants felt from either internal factors, external factors, or a combination of both.

Internal factors included things such as feeling guilty for taking rest or doing things that were non-school related. One participant described logically knowing that she deserved to take time for herself but feeling as though she would not get to enjoy the time because she would be worrying or stressing about all the assignments or things she did not do during that time. Multiple participants described feeling similarly, which prohibited them from doing the things that would have helped alleviate some of the pressure they experienced. Lina, a married, stay-at-home mother of one, reported being in awe of classmates who had families and worked full time due to her own struggles trying to find the balance between school and family. Other external factors that participants described included program expectations, family obligations, and work requirements.

However, feeling pressure to perform did not always hold a negative connotation for participants. Zeligman et al. (2015) also noted that women of color in higher education often felt compelled to be role models or to set an example for other women of color. Along this same vein, Sandra noted feeling the need to capitalize on every opportunity and motivated herself by thinking of the example she was setting for her children. Dee Dee specifically cited being a role model as one of the main ways her ethnicity impacted her graduate student experience as well as her dynamic in her roles at work.

Theme 6: Learning for life

More than half of the participants learned profound personal lessons as graduate student MoCs. Zeligman et al. (2015) confirmed the benefits of sharing the experiences and perspectives of women of color in higher education. In some cases, the lessons learned were internal adjustments participants made; however, others noted learning new and better ways to interact with others. For example, Dee Dee described learning that she could find ways to reconcile her career as a counselor, the open-mindedness necessary to help others, and her faith.

These lessons also provided self-awareness and taught participants more about themselves than they knew at the beginning of their programs. In other instances, participants learned skills that would shape them as future practitioners as well as aid them in their day to day lives. Lina spoke about the life lessons she learned as adding to her self-awareness and as having changed the way she interacts with her family members.

Many of the self-discoveries participants made would not have occurred if they were not faced with various challenges and scenarios in their academic programs. Lynch (2008) shared concerns about graduate student mothers facing conflicts on multiple fronts and with minimal support. Although this was seen in some ways, participants primarily reported benefitting from the things they learned even if they were frustrated at the time.

Although being burned out is not a state anyone would recommend, participants also shared a number of insights they gained throughout their experiences of burnout. Dee Dee described the things she learned about herself during her program as "immeasurable." Another participant noted that she realized that she was stronger than she thought she was and that if she could make it through her circumstances, she couldn't imagine allowing anything to derail her in the pursuit of her goals.

Theme 7: Self-care: Yeah, right!

Interviewing participants led me to see that women of color do not truly identify with the construct of self-care as it has been loosely defined and taught. That being said, it is not difficult to understand why these same mothers had a hard time utilizing self-care and when they did make efforts for self-care, there was almost unavoidable guilt or an inherent need to explain or justify why they took whatever time they took. For the most part, participants shared that the subject of self-care was mentioned briefly during some of their classes. However, depth to and true understanding of the concept of self-care remained absent, so much so, some participants seemed unsure as to whether the activities they engaged in would "count" as self-care.

According to Nelson et al. (2018), self-care is a vital lesson for graduate students. However, most graduate students are not provided with sufficient training or practical strategies (Nelson et al., 2018). When asked about self-care, most participants noted some sort of personal pampering such as going for a massage or a mani-pedi. Even though mani-pedis and massages can be considered acts of self-care for some, self-care for MoCs does not necessarily fall into an individualistic mold. Often MoCs have more collectivist mentalities (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Cohen, 2009), which can mean activities they do alone or solely for themselves can sometimes make them feel selfish, which in turn does not feel good. This may influence why MoCs do not make more concerted efforts to implement self-care despite recognizing its importance.

Across the board, participants reported recognizing the importance of self-care; however, it was still not made a priority. It may be prudent for programs to find a way to make the concept of self-care connect with students from diverse backgrounds in more meaningful ways for them to take implementation seriously (Butler et al., 2019). The sparse coverage of self-care most academic programs provide does not shed light on the vast scope of areas self-care practices can encompass (Butler et al., 2019). Some of these areas include sleep habits, engagement at work, social support, replacing existing destructive coping mechanisms, and prayer, to name a few (Butler et al., 2019).

Due in part to how self-care appears to be defined, many MoCs may deem any efforts they make toward self-care as inadequate. In order to address this issue, I propose operationalizing a definition of self-care that is culturally sound. In order to operationalize self-care for MoCs, we must accept that these women do not often engage

in activities that are solely for themselves. Butler et al. (2019) proposed self-care as a multi-dimensional concept spanning six distinct domains: professional, physical, relational, spiritual, emotional, and psychological. For MoCs, at least three of these domains overlap. Culturally sound self-care would include activities and interactions that help MoCs relax, feel rejuvenated, or just enjoy the moment. For example, more than one participant noted spending time with their children was something they did to reconnect and to bring themselves joy. Immersing themselves in caring relationships and spending time with loved ones was an act of self-care for these mothers.

To engage in self-care is to make sacrifices. It became clear throughout the interviews that for these mothers, the typically defined idea of self-care is sacrificed out of perceived necessity in order to achieve a set goal or for the benefit of others within their sphere of care. One participant noted using the time away from her foster children allotted for respite in order to care for her elderly mother as opposed to taking that time to rejuvenate and recharge herself. All the mothers I interviewed reported understanding the necessity of self-care. However, only two of the moms had active, measurable ways that they implemented self-care in their lives. Even those moms noted the need to take this time with more regularity as well as the wish that programs made it more feasible for graduate students to be able to do so.

Theme 8: Faith and God's grace

Faith held varying levels of importance based on the individual participant's culture and upbringing. In this study, most participants attributed notable significance to their faith and belief structures. Zeligman et al. (2015) found that spirituality and faith

were often regarded as primary systems of support for women of color in higher education. Participants in this study relayed similar information. For the participants who shared about their faith, it was clear that they relied heavily on their beliefs as a means of coping with stress and personal struggles in addition to the active support others who shared in their faith provided.

For example, Kathy spoke about having a best friend she reached out to when feeling overwhelmed. She noted her best friend shared in her faith and often encouraged her with scripture and prayers. Further, Kathy shared that when she found herself lacking faith, her friend would not judge or condemn her, but would pray for her instead. This was noteworthy for her, particularly because not all the members of her support system who shared in her faith provided such encouragement. Kathy relied heavily on her faith for encouragement, while Dee Dee relied on her faith for even more. Dee Dee shared that she regularly participated in a dance ministry at her church as a means of getting away and remaining active.

Participants used their faith structures and belief in a higher power to reassure themselves and remain motivated. In some cases, the activities they engaged in provided much needed mental rest and became a means of culturally sound self-care. As Butler et al. (2019) suggested, recognizing spirituality as a self-care domain seemed central to participant's experiences and may reveal more about how participants who practice systems of faith differ from those who do not.

How it all ties together

In this study MoCs described their experiences of burnout and how they managed those experiences in detail. I analyzed and coded these details and ultimately whittled down the data into eight themes. By using an RCT lens during the analysis and interpretation of data, it became clear that the themes fell into two categories: a) themes denoting a barrier to connection, or b) themes denoting healthy coping mechanisms. These two categories appear indicative of participants' feelings of either *aloneness* or *support* throughout their experiences of burnout. Multicultural scholars agree that the application of a relational model when conceptualizing is integral when collectivist values are involved (Schmidt et al., 2014). From an RCT perspective, the MoCs who participated in this study experienced burnout in terms of paradoxical relational connections belonging to either the category of aloneness (little or no connection) or the category of support (growth-fostering relationships) (see *Figure 1.*).

The themes where the foundations for relational connection were "poor" were: The struggle is real, Alone/Isolation, Bottoming out, Doing what needs to be done, Pressure to perform, and Self-care, "Yeah right." In each of these themes participants shared the stress and anxiety they dealt with as they withstood various experiences as graduate students in online CMHC programs. These experiences included issues with program requirements, work/school-life balance, as well as unrealistic expectations they had placed on them by others as well as by themselves. In each case the interactions with professors, peers, and family members were not growth-fostering and often left participants feeling stressed, alone, and without support.

The themes where the foundations for relational connection were "good" were: Faith and God's grace and Learning for life. I derived these two themes from the recurring ideas that most participants found support, reassurance, and comfort in their spiritual/religious beliefs as well as the lessons they learned about themselves. In each case, no matter the level of stress described, participants frequently reevaluated their experiences and noted lessons they learned as well as how they relied on their faith to get them through their hardest times. Most often the lessons learned were about themselves in relationship to others and ways to interact more successfully with people from different backgrounds or creeds.

For the MoCs in this study, relational connections formed the foundation for growth that was challenged by the disconnections of burnout (see *Figure 2.*). In order to offset these disconnections, MoCs need to establish healthy coping mechanisms (see *Figure 3.*). Figure one is an illustrative overview of the experiences of burnout by MoCs from an RCT perspective. RCT theorists suggest that a foundation for connection exists in all relationships (Jordan, 2017). When a relationship has a poor foundation, barriers to connection exist. When relational foundations are good, MoCs are able to feel connected and see themselves growing. In this study, MoCs described various relationships with family members, classmates, professors, and professional peers that had poor relational foundations and often left the MoC feeling disconnected. Figure two is an illustration of the themes described by MoCs from this study in terms of barriers to connection. Figure two would fit under the "poor" trajectory on the left side of figure one if it were inset. Figure three depicts the two themes, Faith and God's grace and Learning for life, that

were healthy coping mechanisms MoCs in this study utilized in order to navigate their instances of burnout. Figure three would fit under the "good" trajectory on the right side of figure one if it were inset.

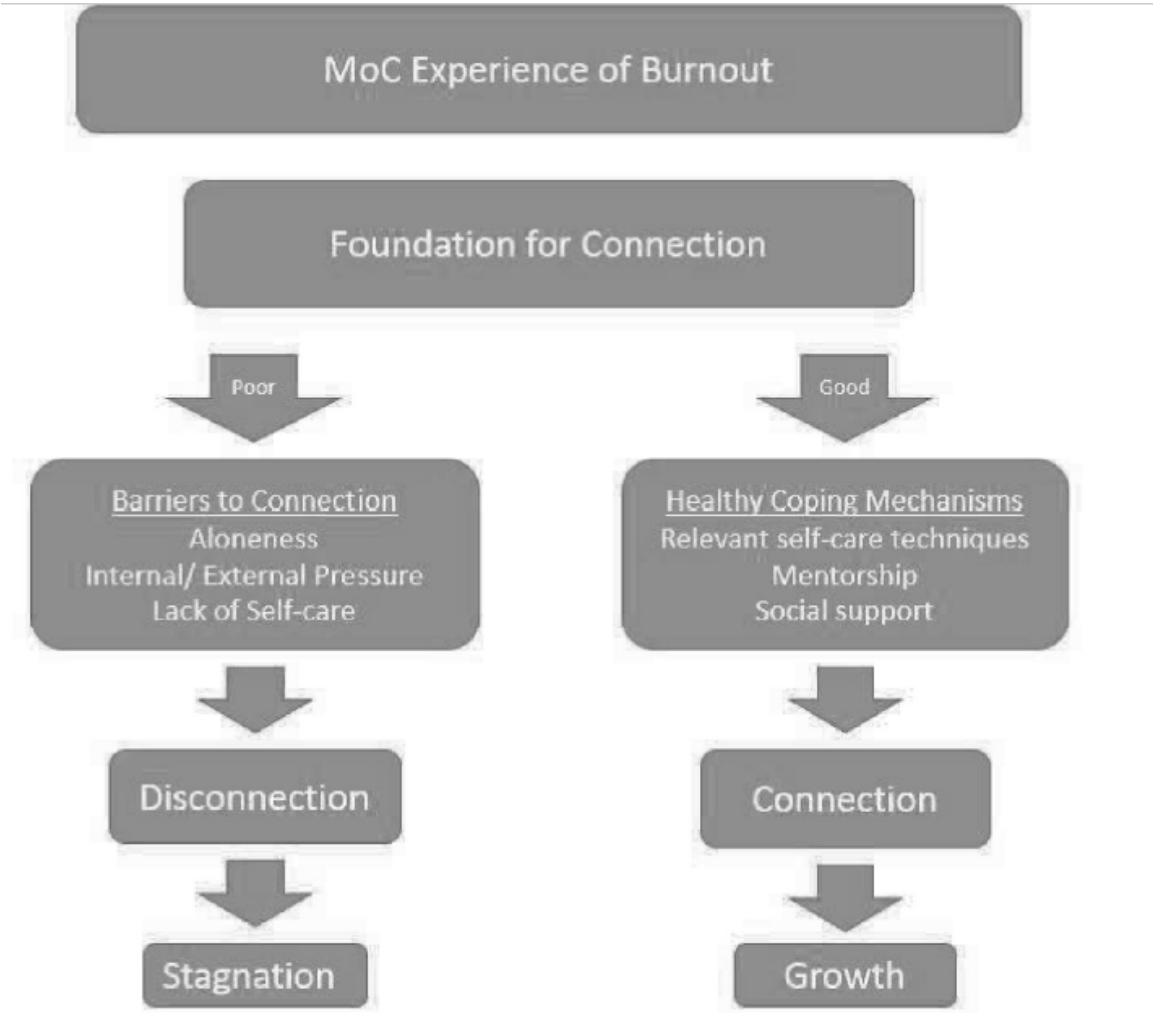

Figure 1. RCT Experience of Burnout.

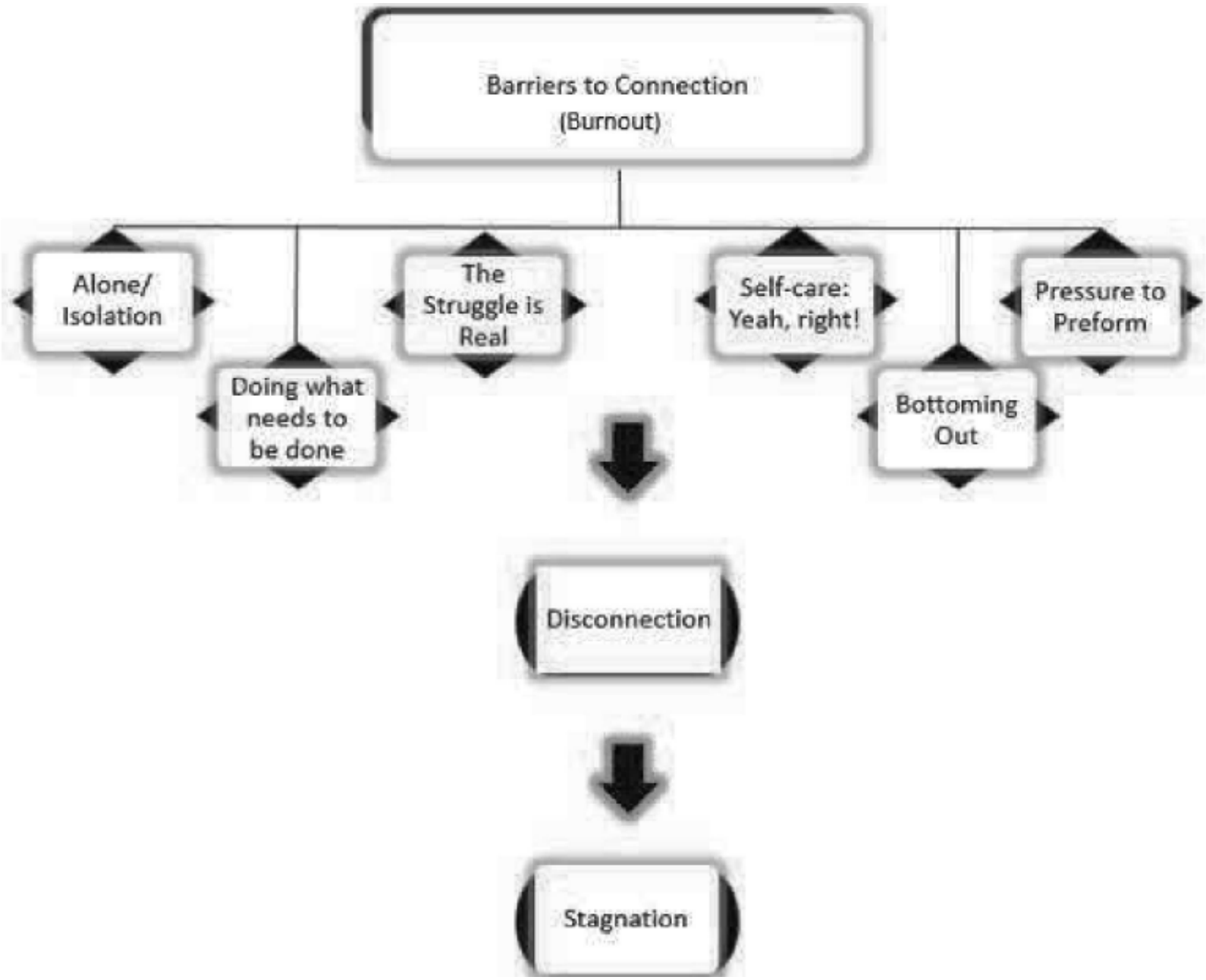

Figure 2. Themes Within the Theory: Barriers to Connection.

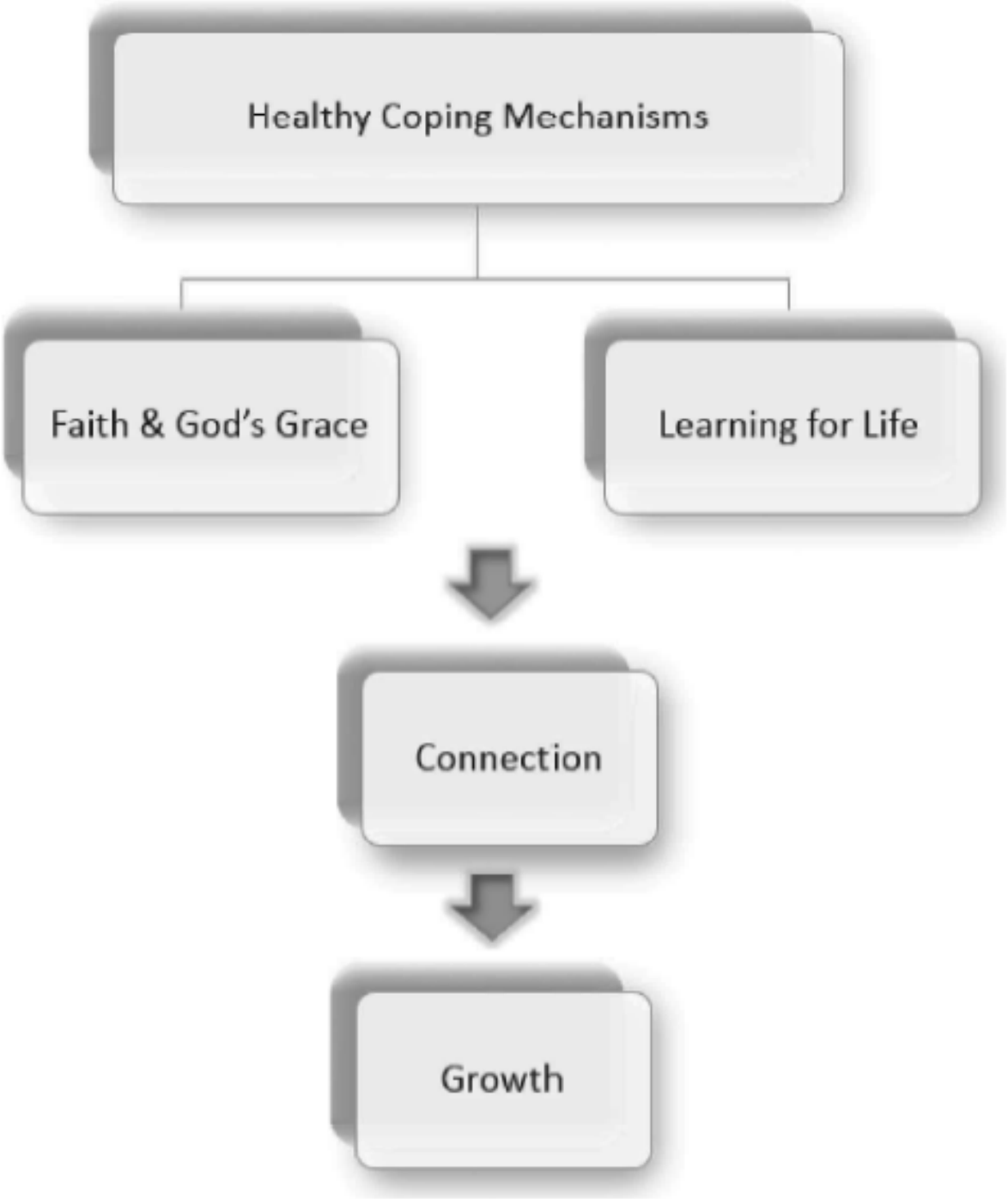

Figure 3. Themes Within the Theory: Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Unfortunately, the current education and training many MoCs receive does not adequately prepare them to navigate burnout effectively. Hall et al. (2014) suggested that current pedagogical practices were ineffective when it came to multicultural and relational competencies. This became clear when the majority of participants noted that in spite of knowing that self-care is necessary, they rarely, if ever, participated in what are considered to be traditional self-care activities, such as getting a massage or a manicure and pedicure. Further discussion of self-care illuminated the fact that for most participants, commonly accepted self-care activities were not representative of activities they actually found relaxing or rejuvenating. Instead, the participants in the current study more often described self-care in terms of relationships that helped refresh them but did not equate this time spent as self-care. For example, some participants noted spending uninterrupted time with their children or talking on the phone with a close friend who prays for them was what they did to rejuvenate themselves.

Butler et al., 2019 asserted that there is no "one-size fits all" (p.120) to self-care. What works as self-care for some people, will not necessarily translate into self-care for others as was repeatedly communicated by the participants. The inability to utilize commonly accepted self-care activities was cited as a source of stress and self-recrimination for most of the MoCs in this study. MoCs who participated in this study tended to experience life from a collectivist point of view for the simple fact that they took into consideration their children and family commitments in all that they did. Jordan (2017) affirmed that for many, the "individualistic-competitive cultural myth p. 233" exists as a social prescription, not a biological imperative. This idea that people are

inherently selfish and are biologically predisposed to focusing on self-interest or independence is a misleading interpretation of Darwin's observations (survival of the fittest) that RCT theorists continually seek to discredit (Jordan, 2017). Thus, the use of RCT as a framework and guide to pursuing social justice in various arenas, such as academia, is not only timely, but appropriate. The experiences of burnout by MoCs completing an online CMHC program was a suitable inquiry to explore from a relational cultural lens. For most participants, completing their graduate programs online presented them with challenges both academically and personally. The *disconnectedness* inherent in online education left most of the participants feeling adrift and alone, especially at times when they were burned out.

Lenz (2016) asserted that RCT as a framework has the potential to illustrate individuals' experiences across gender roles and contexts and may be integral to the promotion of the rhetoric of wellness. In this study, all of the participants ascribed to traditional gender roles in which the woman or mom facilitated the majority of the house and care-taking work while the partner/spouse played a supporting role but was primarily a provider. In some cases, the participants were providers as well as caretakers, if they worked outside of the home. This did not differ based on marital status, as single mothers were already filling both provider and caretaker roles.

Understanding the experience of burnout in terms of relationships can help build a new way of thinking for program developers and policy makers. When developers think relationally, they may make access to peer groups or mentorship opportunities a priority. These types of relationships are growth-fostering and may help graduate students

succeed. The idea of promoting wellness first in program development as opposed to seeking wellness after an issue presents may also help to decrease incidents of burnout. Based on the data from this study, MoCs enrolled in online CMHC programs may benefit from developing ways to maintain growth fostering relationships successfully throughout their academic programs. Growth fostering relationships such as peer or cohort groups and mentorship relationships denote *supportive* relationships which could assist them in navigating their experiences of burnout with minimal stagnation. An additional benefit could also include helping graduate student MoCs develop habits such as self-awareness and an ability to be introspective that they will need to be successful counselors in the future.

Limitations of the Study

To some extent, this study was limited by the number of participants. As previously noted, I was only able to find six participants who were both willing and able to participate in the study. However, the participants who volunteered for the study provided highly descriptive and information rich interviews. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) emphasized the idea of information power as being more important to qualitative research, especially in interview studies than having a large sample size. The authors suggested that in the case of very specific or rare experiences, like that of MoCs in CACREP-accredited online CMHC programs, the number of eligible participants would already be limited (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Although this study evidenced a limited number of participants, emphasis was placed on obtaining detailed

descriptions of the participants' experiences during each interview (Malterud et al., 2016).

After more than 6 months of seeking participants and a number of changes to the recruitment procedures and participant parameters, finding eligible and willing participants was more difficult than I anticipated. I would caution future researchers to avoid limiting their recruitment strategies, and I would suggest starting out with the broadest scope possible. I believe the changes made in recruitment resulted in a more representative sample as it opened the opportunity to hear from a broader range of culturally diverse participants. This group included married, single, and divorced moms, biological moms and foster moms, mothers of school age children, and grandmothers, helping their grown children raise babies in their homes. The participants also represented women who identified as Latina, Asian, and African-American. Without the changes that occurred, I may not have had as much diversity in the small sample that I was able to obtain.

In addition to the recruitment issues, another potential limitation was the technological setbacks I experienced during some of the phone interviews. I attempted to minimize potential technological concerns by foregoing the use of various video calling options and relying on direct phone calls. However, in at least three of the interviews, there were still instances where the phone lines had connectivity problems, and either the participant was unable to hear me, or I was unable to hear them. In those instances, participants repeated themselves, but the initial candor of the moment was lost, and they may not have repeated their initial response exactly as it first came to them. Thankfully

the issues were brief and resolved themselves quickly, so no further actions were needed to correct the issues or compensate for the disruptions.

Recommendations

My recommendations for further research include repeating this study again with another group of master's level CMHC students and graduate MoCs as well as conducting this study with the students and recent graduate MoCs in online Ph.D. counseling programs. I believe opening the study parameters to include Ph.D. students will broaden the application for the findings as well as provide a larger potential participant pool in order to increase the number of responses, which would allow for more information. I suggest repeating the study again with a similar population. In doing so, it will be important for researchers to anticipate and plan for a longer recruitment period or consider implementing alternate strategies to seek participants and encourage participation. Conducting this study again with a similar population will hopefully provide even more insight into the needs and services MoCs would find beneficial from their online CMHC (or Ph.D.) programs.

It occurred to me during this process that graduate students who were already feeling overwhelmed might not have had the wherewithal or energy to take time out in order to help a researcher, especially when they were already feeling pressed for time. In conducting a study on student burnout, researchers need to be cautious not to add to the burden participants are attempting to handle. In the future, it might be preferable to find a way to seek students who are either between terms on some sort of break or to find a way to make participation beneficial but remain non coercive and within ethical guidelines. I

attempted to ameliorate some of this additional burden by speaking with recent graduates, as well. However, I found that most participants admitted to feeling burned out or overwhelmed regardless of their being students or recent graduates.

My final recommendation is for future researchers to use more culturally sound suggestions or allow MoCs to share what they find rejuvenating when discussing self-care. Butler et al.'s (2019) proposal of self-care as a multi-dimensional concept could be useful in reassessing and expressing the concept of self-care in a way that has meaning for MoCs. As I explored the data participants presented, three of the six domains, Butler et al. (2019) presented seemed to be more prominent than others. MoCs seem to primarily use relational, spiritual, and emotional things within their lives to cultivating feelings of personal joy and rejuvenation. Further exploration of this concept would be beneficial for this and other diverse populations and may aid in transitioning self-care from an occasionally used abstract concept to a well-integrated practice.

Reflections on the researcher's experience

Completing this study has been one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced. Though writing a dissertation is understandably daunting, I was surprised by just how ambiguous the entire process felt. I believe this was in part due to the flexibility in GT methodology. Conducting a GT study meant allowing a lot of the data collection and analysis process to be organic. Being somewhat type A, this presented me with the task of actively ensuring that I was not forcing the data into any shape aside from the one it took on its own. Instead of looking at the data as a means of proving or disproving something, I made sure to look at the data each participant shared and then looking again

at the things multiple participants mentioned. Further, I took those instances where multiple mentions arose and found patterns in the information. I used those patterns to describe themes in the data, which allowed me to look at the experiences of my participants through the lens of RCT and see things more clearly.

Conducting research on a population that is similar to you or one in which you've been yourself presents a few challenges but also provides priceless insight. While conducting each of these interviews, I found myself completely relating and feeling connected to the participants' stories and experiences. Even in the aspects that were different for them, it made me consider how different my own experiences might have been if I had or did whatever that participant shared. Lewis (2001) instructed researchers to be prepared to manage their emotions and do "emotion- work" when faced with sensitive topics and/or populations. Although Lewis (2001) spoke of being a Black, Lesbian researcher studying Black, Lesbians at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), her findings apply to all researchers who find themselves sensitive to the research and/or population they are studying.

As the researcher in this study, I empathized with the participants in a way that allowed me to be as thoughtful as possible and to present the information they provided as true to life. Having similar experiences during my master's program and feeling similarly throughout my current doctoral program lent itself to my desire to ensure the information I presented was truly representative of the participants' experiences. I realized throughout the process of transcribing the interviews that I found myself commiserating in the participants' experiences and explanations.

Obviously, this study has been a labor of love for me, but there were also deep emotional ties for me that were illuminated by some of the interviews. For example, I was drawn to the topic of burnout because I experienced it and witnessed it in other MoCs I knew, specifically toward the end of my master's program. As such, I struggled for over a year during this process to get my proposal approved because although I wholeheartedly believed in this study from its inception, I had to ensure that my vision could be seen by others and understood to be a thing of potential value for academia as a whole. The year-long back and forth communications with committee members and the numerous edits dampened my initial excitement for the process. In addition, it made me question my ability to incite interest and change, whereas the eventual approval felt like a colossal win and a confirmation of my personal ability as an academician. During the interviews, there were moments when participants would voice feelings of gratitude that someone else "got it," and I can honestly say that my experience with this process definitely paralleled those feelings. Obtaining approval to complete this study made me feel as though I was finally able to communicate the necessity of my research as valid and important in a way that allowed others in academia to "get it."

Throughout this process, I maintained a reflective journal that was often a jumble of words and thoughts after an interview, randomly while coding, or when sitting down to write. When looking back upon those pages to my thoughts and emotions at those times, the prevailing emotion and most written word was frustration. Interestingly, this word was yet another parallel between participants and me. The dissertation process is not for the faint of heart. However, I also noted the feeling of accomplishment and the rightness I

would feel when I completed an interview, and a participant would thank me or share their good wishes for the remainder of my process. All the women I spoke to at some point noted their encouragement or gratitude for me taking the time to try to amplify their voices and make known their needs. We all seemed to share in the idea of paving the way for future graduate student MoCs to have the support and systems in place that were not there for each of us.

Though I am passionate about the topic of burnout and helping others like myself to find better ways to cope and find school-life balance, I would be remiss if I did not express how much of a struggle it was to find this at times in my own life as I worked through this process. My family, my dissertation chair, and a small network of fellow doctoral students helped me navigate this process via numerous phone calls, emails, and texts.

Implications for Social Change

Although the research I conducted was specific to online CMHC programs, it may also have implications for other students, counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors, as well as other helping professionals (Puig et al., 2012). Christopher and Maris (2010) supported the need for addressing burnout throughout counselor training and education. The implications this study may have for social change include the potential to identify areas where multicultural sensitivity is needed in program development and interventions to helping combat burnout (Miller & Stone, 2011). Specifically, programs need to make a more concerted effort to discuss ways to combat burnout, such as self-care, in a manner that is culturally useful and aware (Butler et al.,

2015). For example, instead of teaching students that burnout is something they will experience when they are practitioners if they don't get regular massages or alone time, programs need to make students aware that burnout can and does happen to students and that in order to be proactive, they need to figure out what activities or whose company helps them feel rejuvenated and replenished and make it a habit to interact with those things or people regularly. In addition, the Relational Cultural Experience of Burnout may further help to inform the development of education and training programs for MoCs, who are up and coming counselors and helping professionals (Holm et al., 2015).

As noted in chapter 2, numerous populations had little or no representation in the available literature on burnout (Lee et al., 2010). It is reasonable to assume that gaining an understanding of how graduate student MoCs manage burnout would not only provide insight into them as students but might help in understanding their professional counterparts as well. Ideally, the findings from this research will help to begin filling this void. Academic program developers may also use these findings to inform the development of support groups or communities for MoCs in online learning environments. Participants almost unanimously shared the need for additional support within the designs of their programs as well as a notable call for mentorship.

Mentorship in online higher learning is another area of implication illuminated by participants. The availability and access to mentorship in online learning needs to be improved (Oguz et al., 2015). Kathy shared that she felt having a mentor was important for adult students, especially first-time graduate students. Although mentorship is thought to be integral to success in some ways, finding mentorship opportunities for graduate

students of color can be difficult (Zeligman et al., 2015). The lack of mentorship opportunities is further exacerbated when the graduate student is also a mother (Holm et al., 2015). Anaya (2011) noted mentorship experiences with faculty of color to be particularly impactful when available to graduate student MoCs. Zeligman et al. (2015) further reported sharing racial and cultural backgrounds was important to minority graduate students. Mable noted having a professor who looked like her would have been both inspiring and encouraging. These findings support the idea that mentorship of any kind would be helpful, but mentorship from another woman of color or MoC would be extraordinary.

Conclusion

The overall findings of the interviews revealed that, for most of the MoCs I interviewed, self-care, as it is presented by academia, is not used with any regularity, if at all. Traditional definitions of self-care and suggested activities did not fully apply for participants as the idea of focusing totally on themselves did not hold the same rejuvenating properties. These online graduate student MoCs faced any number of pressures and struggles from their various roles at any given time. Although online learning presented some challenges, participants generally reported having positive experiences in their programs. Many MoCs in online CACREP-accredited CMHC programs relied on their faith and belief structures in order to motivate themselves but reported being desirous of finding ways to implement culturally sound self-care practices both regularly and without feelings of guilt.

The idea that MoCs may feel unable to relay their needs or experiences to members of their support systems for fear of sounding as though they are complaining should be explored further. The findings of this study extend knowledge in the discipline by providing insight into the experiences of graduate student mothers who were not only in online learning environments but were also from diverse backgrounds. As noted in Chapter 2, multiple authors decry the lack of diversity in the existing research on burnout as well as the need for research specific to graduate counseling students (Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012; Viehl et al., 2017; Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). Although small in scale, this study is a start toward filling this essential gap.

Burnout continues to plague graduate students, and even though some lucky ones figure their way out from under this burden in order to graduate, others are not as fortunate. The findings of this study of online graduate student MoCs were unexpected but necessary. Giving a voice to a population that is actively growing but has continually been silenced by society and cultural expectations was more than I could have imagined or intended. All in all, MoCs in online CACREP-accredited CMHC programs need support to combat burnout and to thrive in an online learning environment. What that support looks like may vary, but the support itself needs to be made available.

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Appendix A: Research Recruitment Letter

Consent to participate in a Demographic Survey and Interviews

Dear Colleague:
You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the experiences and management of burnout by mothers of color completing a CACREP-accredited Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling online.

Title: Relational Cultural Experience and Management of Burnout by Mothers of Color in Online CMHC Programs

Burnout is conceptualized as negative symptoms individuals experience within three dimensions: a) personal accomplishment, b) depersonalization, and c) emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Wilkerson, 2009).

Your participation in this study will help our profession gain knowledge about the experiences of burnout by women of color who are mothers completing their graduate education online. The information from this study may provide information which graduate counseling programs may find beneficial. The study is being conducted by Juliana J. Forrest-Lytle, a doctoral candidate within the School of Counseling at Walden University. Your participation has been requested because you are a Master's student currently enrolled in a graduate program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.
Please consider participating in my research study into the *Relational Cultural Experience and Management of Burnout by Women of Color who are Mothers enrolled in an Online Learning Environment*. Participation is open to all mothers of color who are currently enrolled in an online CACREP-Accredited Master's-level Clinical Mental Health Counseling program and identify as having experienced burnout within the current school year. If you meet the inclusionary criteria, you are invited to complete the demographic survey via the hyperlink at the bottom of this page and to schedule a phone interview at a time of your convenience.

Eligibility Criteria

- You are currently enrolled in an online CACREP-accredited Master's level Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.
- You identify as belonging to at least one racial/ethnic group not categorized as White (of Caucasian/European descent).
- You are a mother.
- You have experienced burnout during the current school year.

Benefits and Risks

Benefits: Your participation in this study will greatly assist our understanding of the experiences of burnout by mothers of color as well as how they manage burnout while completing graduate level counseling coursework online. This information will assist us in future research pertaining to the specific needs of these students for potential academic and social support, as it pertains to managing their experiences of burnout.
Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to your safety. As with any research, however, there is a possibility that you may be subjected to minor discomforts, such as feelings of stress or negative reactions to interview questions or some other aspect of this study.

The researcher is a Registered Mental Health Counselor Intern in the state of Florida and is a mandated reporter, who is required by state law to report any abuse, whether past or present, of children or vulnerable adults. Should you disclose during your participation any intent to harm yourself or others, you will be asked to leave the study and referred to a national mental health hotline. In the event that you disclose an intent to harm others with a clear plan, the researcher is bound by law to report your intention and plan to legal authorities.

Cost and Payments
Aside from the time involved in your completion of the survey and interviews, there are no costs for you to participate in this study. In addition you will not receive any monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw from the Study
Your participation in research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study and wish to discontinue your participation at any time, you have the right to withdraw from the study without consequence. Should you wish to contact the researcher regarding your participation in the study or your right to withdraw, please utilize the contact information provided. Please know that the researcher retains the right to discontinue your participation in the study, for any reason including preservation of the study or issues related to safety, without receiving your consent.

Confidentiality
The only identifying information that the researcher will maintain access to is demographic information reported by the participants. The demographic information includes items related to ethnicity, age, status as a graduate student, marital status, employment status, and the number and ages of children. Participants will be asked to give themselves a “Nickname” or Pseudonym for the purpose of the interviews. Names or identities will not be collected, considered, or released. It is my belief that precautionary measures are in place to minimize the possibility of revealing your identity. No

identifying information will be linked to your responses in any reports, presentations, or publications.

IRB Approval
This study has been reviewed by The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) #12-17-18-0130437. The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies.

If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact Dr. Rhonda Neswald-Potter at:

Rhonda Neswald-Potter, Ph.D., LPCC, ACS
Core Faculty, CMHC Program
Walden University

Statement of Informed Consent
Your choice to use the survey link and participate in the interview process is an indication that:
· You are confirming that you have read this form or have had it read to you, and you are confident that you understand this form, the research study, its risks and benefits, and your rights;
· You are also confirming that, if you had questions, you had the opportunity to raise them prior to completing the survey and interviews, that you received responses to your inquiries;
· You confirm that you are currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited graduate program in a clinical mental health counseling, identify as a Mother of Color, and have experienced burnout within the current school year;
· Finally, you confirm that you are at least 18 years old, there are no restrictions or concerns about your participation in this survey, and you voluntarily agree and provide consent to participate in this survey.

Please feel free to print a copy of this page for your records.
I would appreciate your assistance in forwarding this email to others in your network who may wish to participate in this study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Juliana J. Forrest-Lytle, MS, RMHCI
Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education & Supervision
Walden University
Juliana.forrest@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

1. Ethnicity (Please select all that apply and provide detail if known: for example African-American and Hispanic/Latino [Panamanian])

    - African American/Black _____
    - Caucasian/White _____
    - Hispanic/Latino _____
    - Alaska Native _____
    - American Indian _____
    - Native Hawaiian _____
    - Pacific Islander _____
    - Asian _____
    - Other (Please Specify) _____

2. Marital status (Please select one)
    - Married
    - Single
    - Divorced
    - Cohabiting

3. Age (Please select one)
    - 18-20
    - 21-30
    - 31-40
    - 41-50
    - 51+

4. Number of Children (Please select one)
    - 1-2
    - 3-4
    - 5 or more
    - Children out of home/ Adult children

5. School enrollment Status (Please select one)
    - Part-time student
    - Full-time student

6. Employment Status (Please select one)
    - Stay-at-home Mom
    - Part-Time (less than 40 hours per week)
    - Full-Time (40 hours or more per week)

Appendix C: Informal Interview Protocol

Brief Introduction of researcher and research and how it came about

Verbal informed consent

Rapport building- Give yourself a pseudonym that makes you feel like your strongest self.

Tell me about who you are/ see yourself as.

Talk about your experiences as both a graduate student and a mother.

Talk about how your ethnicity and culture impact your experiences as a graduate student.

Tell me about a time when you felt defeated. What did you do to get yourself back on track?

Who, if anyone, do you reach out to when you feel overwhelmed? What about this person makes you reach out to him/her?

How do you make time to do things you enjoy?

When you make time for yourself, what do you do?

What are some of the challenges you have with your online learning process?

What are some changes you wish were incorporated into online learning to make the process better for you?